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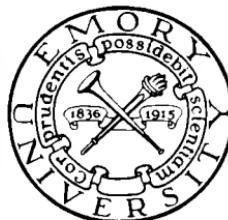
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P R E F A C E.

To have entered, more fully than I have done, into the events and fighting prior to the Retreat from Cabul, would have proved unsuitable for the purpose of my story, and for these events I must refer the reader to history or the newspapers of the time.

An officer of the Queen's 44th Regiment escaped death in the Khyber Pass in the mode narrated in its place, by wrapping the regimental colour round him; and strange and varied as the adventures of Captain Waller may appear, after the last fatal stand was made by our troops, some such incidents actually occurred to a Havildar of the Shah's Ghoorka Regiment, after its complete destruction in Afghanistan, so there is much that is real woven up with my story.

Fiction, according to Sir Francis Bacon, infuses in literature that which history denies, and in some measure satis-

fies the mind with shadows, when it cannot enjoy the substance—the shadows of an ideal world. “Art is long and life is short, so we do wisely to live in as many worlds as we can.”

CONTENTS.



CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE TIME WILL COME	9
II.	RHOSCHADZHEL	17
III.	THE ALARM BELL	20
IV.	POWDERED WITH TEARS	25
V.	PORTHELLICK VILLA	31
VI.	RICHARD'S MYSTERY	35
VII.	LADY LAMORNA	39
VIII.	THE BROKEN CIRCLE	44
IX.	FOREBODINGS	48
X.	THE LONELY TARN	52
XI.	CONCERNING FLIRTATION	57
XII.	THE PIXIES' HOLE	65
XIII.	THE TIDE IN !	71
XIV.	LOST	75
XV.	THE SEARCH	80
XVI.	INTELLIGENCE AT LAST	84
XVII.	THE TRECARRELS	89
XVIII.	HE LOVES ME TRULY	94
XIX.	THE GREATER SORROW	101
XX.	A FAMILY GROUP	106
XXI.	HUMILIATION	111
XXII.	"MRS. GRUNDY"	118
XXIII.	A LEGAL "FRIEND"	124

CHAP.		PAGE
XXIV. THE DOCTRINE OF CHANCES	-	128
XXV. MISCONCEPTION	-	135
XXVI. REVERSES	-	139
XXVII. ALONE !	-	144
XXVIII. BEYOND THE LAND OF THE SUN	-	148
XXIX. IN THE AFGHAN FORT	-	153
XXX. THE WARNING	-	156
XXXI. WHAT TOOK US THERE	-	162
XXXII. TIFFIN WITH THE TRECARRELS	-	166
XXXIII. THE APPOINTMENT	-	171
XXXIV. "THE BAND PLAYS AT TWO"	-	177
XXXV. THE DRIVE	-	182
XXXVI. ADVENTURE IN CABUL	-	187
XXXVII. THE MOSQUE OF BABER	-	192
XXXVIII. " <i>Only an Ensign</i> "	-	196
XXXIX. ASSASSINATION	-	203
XL. HOME IN THE SPIRIT	-	211
XLI. IN THE FORTIFIED CAMP	-	215
XLII. CHRISTMAS AT CABUL	-	219
XLIII. THE MORNING OF THE RETREAT	-	227
XLIV. THE HALT BY THE LOGHUR RIVER	-	233
XLV. SPIRITED AWAY !	-	237
XLVI. THE SKIRMISH	-	243
XLVII. IN THE KHYBER PASS	-	247
XLVIII. WALLER'S ADVENTURES	-	251
XLIX. CHANCE BETTER THAN DESIGN	-	259
L. DENZIL A NAWAB	-	268
LI. A MEETING	-	274
LII. MARRIED OR NOT ?	-	279
LIII. THE WANDERER	-	284
LIV. THE LOST STEAMER	-	290

CHAP.	PAGE
IV. PAR NOBILE FRATRUM !	296
LVI. DOWNIE'S REFLECTIONS	300
LVII. MR. W. S. SHARKLEY'S PLOT	305
LVIII. THE HOPE OF THE DEAD	312
LIX. RETRIBUTION	319
LX. AT JELLALABAD	324
LXI. THE SCHEME OF ZOHRAH	331
LXII. MABEL DELUDED	338
LXIII. BY THE HILLS OF BEYMARU	344
LXIV. AGAIN IN CABUL	351
LXV. THE ABODE OF THE KHOOND	356
LXVI. THE SHADE WITHIN THE SHADOW	364
LXVII. ROSE IN A NEW CHARACTER	368
LXVIII. WITH SALE'S BRIGADE	377
LXIX. THE BATTLE OF TIZEEN	381
LXX. TO TOORKISTAN !	387
LXXI. MABEL'S PRESENTIMENT	392
LXXII. THE GOVERNOR OF BAMEEAN	397
LXXIII. THE ALARM	401
LXXIV. TOO LATE !	406
LXXV. THE PURSUIT	413
LXXVI. THE HOSTAGES.	417
LXXVII. THE DURBAR	423
LXXVIII. THE LAMP OF LOVE	428
LXXIX. CONCLUSION	432

ONLY AN ENSIGN.

CHAPTER I.

THE TIME WILL COME.

“Le jour viendra—it is the motto of our family—given to us by Henry VI. ‘The day will come,’ said old Lord Lamorna, proudly, as he lay back in his easy chair, with his elbows resting on the arms thereof, and the tips of his upraised fingers placed together, as if he was about to pray; “and most applicable is that motto to you, nephew Richard, for I am sure that when you are my age you will regret not having taken my advice.”

Richard Trevelyan smiled, but looked somewhat uneasily at his younger brother Downie.

“You are too rich to throw yourself away, and too well-born even for the most highly accomplished daughter of a cotton-lord, or knighted mill-owner,” resumed his stately old uncle, sententiously; “a fellow knighted too probably for dirty ministerial work; but assume a virtue if you have it not, and let us see you——”

“Excuse me, my lord—excuse me, my dear uncle. I have no desire to—marry; why you—youself——”

“Don’t cite me, Richard. You are only forty-three, if so much” (and here, for the information of our young lady readers, we may mention that Richard is *not* the hero of these pages). “I am past seventy, yet I may marry yet, and do you all out of the title,” added Lamorna, with a laugh like a cackle.

“My brother Dick is certainly the most listless of men,” said Downie, as he selected some grapes with the embossed scissors, and filled his glass with chateau d’Yquem.

“I don’t think that I am so,” retorted Richard.

“Downie is right,” said Lord Lamorna. “Why do you not go into Parliament?—I have two snug pocket boroughs here in Cornwall—and on one hand attack routine and red-tapeism like a Radical; on the other hand, denounce retrenchment and

cowardly peace-at-any-price, like a Tory of the old school. You would certainly be popular with both parties by that *rôle*, and do good to the country at large."

"I have no turn for politics, uncle."

"Diplomacy then—many of our family have figured as diplomats ; I was ambassador to Russia, after Waterloo, and in the olden time more than one of our family have been so to the Courts of Scotland, France, and Brandenburg ; and I trust we all refuted the axiom of Sir Henry Wotton, 'that an ambassador was an honest man sent abroad to lie for the good of his country.'"

"I have no taste for diplomacy."

"What the devil *have* you a taste for ?" asked his uncle testily ; "not domestic life, as I can't get you to marry, like Downie here ; and you soon left the army, or tired of Her Majesty's service."

Richard flushed for a moment, and held his full wine glass between him and the light, as if to test the colour and purity of its contents.

"I know what bachelor London life is—another style of thing, of course, from yours, Downie—that which someone calls the hard-working life, which begins at two P.M. one day, and ends at four A.M. next morning. There are the parks ; the club, with its bow-window ; flirtations at balls and assemblies ; the opera, and parties to Greenwich ; and then there is the darker picture of doing business with old Messrs. Bill Stamp and Cent.-per-Cent., in some dingy little den off the Strand. A bad style of thing it is to meddle with the long-nosed fellows in the discounting line ; just as bad as—and often the sequence to—running after actresses or opera-singers. You may love them if you like ; but, great Heavens ! never stoop to the madness of committing matrimony with any of them, or for a moment forget the family to which you belong, and the ancient title that is your inheritance."

All this was said with undisguised point and pomposity ; the cold grey eyes of Downie Trevlyan had a strange, sour smile in them ; and Richard's face grew more flushed than ever now.

Dinner was over in the stately dining-room of Rhoscadzhel ; Mr. Jasper Funnel, the portly, florid, and white-haired butler, had placed the glittering crystal decanters before his master, who, with two nephews, Richard and Downie Trevlyan, were lingering over their wine ; while in the western light of a September evening, through the tall plate glass windows that reached from the richly-carpeted floor to the painted and gilded ceiling, the Isles of Scilly—the Casserites of the Greeks, the rocks consecrated by the pagan Cornavi to the Sun—could be seen at the

far horizon, literally cradled in the golden blaze of his setting in the sea ; for the house of Rhoscadzhel, in which our story opens, stands near the Land's End, in the brave old Duchy of Cornwall.

Audley Trevelyan, tenth Lord Lamorna, took his title from that little bay or cove which was one of the most romantic spots on the bluff Cornish coast, until it was unfortunately selected by certain utilitarian speculators as a site for granite works ; and near it is a place called the Trewolfe, a triple entrenchment having a subterranean passage, wherein Launcelot Lord Lamorna, with some other Cornish cavaliers, hid themselves in time of defeat from the troopers of Fairfax, as the tourist may find duly recorded in his "John Murray."

He was in his seventieth year ; pale in face and thin in figure, and with his accurate evening costume, for his valet always dressed him for dinner even when alone, the old peer in every gesture and tone displayed the easy bearing of a polished man of the world, and of the highest bearing—keen but cold, calm and unimpressionable.

He had yet much of the wasted beau about his appearance ; he wore rosettes on his shoes and still adhered to a frilled shirt-front and black watered silk ribbon for his gold eye-glass, with a coat having something of the high collar and cut peculiar to the days when George IV. was king. His features were fine and delicately modelled ; his nose a perfect aquiline, with nostrils arched and thin, his snow-white hair was all brushed back to conceal the bald places and to display more fully a forehead of which he had been vain in youth from a fancied resemblance to that of Lord Byron. In short, the Apollo of many a ball-room was now indeed a lean and slippared pantaloon, but still careful to a degree in costume and all the niceties of cuffs and studs and rings.

Calm and self-possessed as he appeared, when now lying back in his down easy-chair, sipping his iced wine and playing with the diamond that glittered on his wasted hand, and which had been a farewell gift from the Empress of Russia, he had been much of a *roné* in his youth, and consequently was not disposed to enquire too closely into the affairs of his nephew.

Downie Trevelyan was already married, nearly to his uncle's satisfaction, his wife being the daughter of a poor but noble family ; and as for Richard, he might run away with as many humble girls as he chose, provided he did not marry any of them, or make that which his haughty uncle and monetary patron would never forgive—a *mésalliance*; for Lord Lamorna was a man full of strong aristocratic prejudices, and a master in all the tactics of society, and of his somewhat exclusive, and occasionally selfish class.

His lordship's false teeth—a magnificent Parisian set that had cost him some fifty guineas—would have chattered at the idea of any member of his family making a mistake in matrimony. He *had* heard ugly whispers about Richard, but never could discover aught that was tangible. If it existed, Heavens ! how were Burke, Debrett and Co. to record it when the time came that it could no longer be concealed ?

Should any *mésalliance* be the case, he had vowed often that the barren title should go without one acre of land to his eldest nephew ; and he would have willed that past him too had it been in his power to do so ; but though a sordid Scottish Earl of Caithness once sold his title to a Highland Chieftain, and caused one of the last clan-battles to be fought in Scotland, such things cannot be done now.

The old man had one ever present, ever prevailing idea—the honour and dignity of the family—the Cornish Trevelyan's of Roscadzhel and Lamorna.

His two nephews were men in the prime of life, but Downie was three years younger than his brother.

Richard Pencarrow Trevelyan, the elder and prime favourite with their uncle, was a remarkably handsome man, with fine regular features that closely resembled those of the old peer ; but Richard had been reared at Sandhurst, been in the army and seen much of a rougher life than his uncle. He had a free bold bearing, an ample chest, an athletic form and muscular limbs, which riding, shooting and handling the bat and the oar had all developed to the full, and which his simple costume—for he was fresh with his gun and his game-bag, from the bleak Cornish moors and mountain sides—advantageously displayed.

His dark blue eyes that were almost black, and seemed so by night, had a keen but open expression, his mouth suggested good humour, his white and regular teeth, perfect health, and his voice had in it a chord that rendered it most pleasant to the ear. Dark eyebrows and a heavy moustache imparted much of character to his face.

His brother, Downie Trevelyan, had never been an idler like Richard. Educated at Rugby and Corpus Christi, Oxford, he had been duly called to the bar by the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, and was now in good practice as a Barrister in London. He had all the air and bearing of a gentleman of good style ; but he was less handsome than Richard ; had less candour of expression in eye and manner ; indeed, his eyes were like cold grey steel, and were quick, restless, and at times furtive in their glances ; and they never smiled, even when his mouth seemed to do so.

Unlike Richard, he was closely shaven, all save a pair of very

short and legal looking whiskers. To please his uncle was one of the unwearying tasks of his life ; and even now, with this view, he was in the most accurate evening dress, thus affording a complete contrast to the rough and unceremonious tweed-suit worn by his brother—his coat broadly lapelled with black silk *moiré*, his vest with three buttons, *en suite* with his shirt studs, which were encrusted with brilliants. His cold formality of manner rendered his periodical visits to Rhoscadzhel somewhat dull to Lord Lamorna, for somehow few people cared much for Mr. Downie Trevelyan. He had married judiciously and early in life, and had now several children ; and thus, while joining his uncle in reprehending or rallying Richard on his supposed anti-matrimonial views, his cold, pale eyes were wandering over the appurtenances, the comforts and splendour of that magnificent apartment, in which he was mentally appraising everything, from the steel fire-irons to the gold and silver plate that glittered on the carved walnut-wood side-board, whereon were displayed many beautiful cups, groups and statuettes (race-trophies of Ascot, Epsom and other courses) which had been won in Lamorna's younger days, when his stud was second to none in England, and certainly equal to that of Lord Eglinton in Scotland ; yet he had never been a gambler, or a "horsey man," being too highly principled in one instance, and too highly bred in the other ; and so we say, while the legal eyes of Downie appraised all, he thought of his eldest son, Audley Trevelyan, then a subaltern in a dashing Hussar Regiment, and marvelled in his heart, if *he* should ever reign as Lord of Rhoscadzhel, manor and chace, with all its moors and tin-mines.

" You were right to marry young, Downie," said the old lord, resuming the theme of their conversation after a pause, adding, as if he almost divined the thoughts of his younger nephew, " your boy Audley is, I hear from General Trecarrel, a handsome fellow."

" He is a perfect Trevelyan, my Lord," replied Downie, who was studious in always according the title to his relative, " and then my daughter, Gartha, bids fair to equal her mother, who was one of the handsomest women in London."

" To see your family rising about you thus, must afford you intense pleasure, Downie ; but I cannot understand our friend Dick here at all. My years may not be many now, and I do not wish my hereditary estate to change hands often, or my lands to be scattered even after I am done with them."

" I do not comprehend your fears, my dear uncle," said Richard, smiling ; " your estates can never lack heirs while God spares me—and then there is Downie——"

" And his son Audley the Hussar—you would say ?"

"Exactly," replied Richard, but in a strange faint voice, and as he spoke he felt that the keen grey eyes of Downie were regarding him attentively by the waxen lights of the chandelier, which Mr. Jasper Funnel and two tall footmen had just illuminated, at the same time drawing the heavy curtains of crimson damask over the last flash of the setting sun, and the ruddy sea whose waves were rolling in blue and gold, between the bluffs of Land's End and the rocky Isles of Scilly.

"You cannot be a woman-hater, Dick?"

"No—far from it," replied Richard, as a soft expression stole over his manly face ; "there can be no such thing in nature."

"The truth is—but take your wine—I strongly fear, that during your military peregrinations, you have got yourself entangled now—and unworthily perhaps."

"My lord—you are mistaken," replied Richard firmly—almost sternly ; "but what causes you to think so?"

"Your so decidedly declining an introduction to General Trecarrel and his two daughters—the most beautiful girls in the duchy of Cornwall. They come of a good family too ; and as the couplet has it :—

" ' By Tre, Pol, and Pen,
Ye may know the Cornish men.' "

"The General resides somewhere near Porthellick, does he not?" asked Downie, who saw that his brother was changing colour, or rather losing it fast.

"Some one told me, Dick, that it was rumoured you got into a scrape in Edinburgh, 'that village somewhere in the North,' as one of our humourists calls it ; it was to the effect that your andlady had fallen over head and ears in love with her handsome lodger, who was ditto ditto in her debt, and had to soothe her ruffled feelings and settle her bill, by matrimony at sight."

"An utter scandal!" said Richard, now laughing. "Your allowance to me, ever since I left the Cornish Light Infantry, has been too generous for such a catastrophe ever to occur."

"And next came a story, that when you were at Montreal with the regiment, you made a precious mess of it with some pretty girl, and—to use Downie's phraseology—parted as heart-broken lovers, to figure as plaintiff and defendant at the bar."

"Worse still and as false, my lord!" exclaimed Richard, now pale with suppressed passion.

"Don't look so darkly, Richard," said Lord Lamorna, who saw the flash in his nephew's dark blue eyes ; "I have had a pretty little box at Chertsey, and a villa at St. John's Wood in my day, when my friends, raven-tressed, or golden-haired as the case might be, were amiable and tenderly attached—but deuced

expensive ; so I must not be severe upon you," added the old man, with his dry cackling laugh. It is not these kind of little arrangements I fear, but a *mésalliance* ; and there are scandals even in London—yes, even in the mighty world of London, though there they soon die ; they don't live and take root, as in the so-called purer air of the country.

"I cannot understand all those vague hints, tales and rumours, or who sets them afloat," replied Richard, making an effort to preserve his calmness.

Downie saw the veins rise in his brother's forehead while their uncle had been speaking ; and he smiled a quiet smile, as he bent curiously over his glass.

"Full many a shaft at random sent,
Finds mark the archer never meant ;"

and he could see that some of the random remarks in the present conversation rankled deeply in Richard's breast ; and that this conversation had verged, more than once, on somewhat dangerous ground.

"Well, it is a marvel to me, Richard, how a handsome fellow like you can have escaped so long, known as you are to be the heir to my title and estates," continued the old lord, still harping on the same topic ;" for the girls now go in for winning in matrimony, as we used to do at Ascot and Epsom."

"How, my lord ?" asked Downie, as if he had never heard the joke before.

"By a neck—a bare neck and bosom added ; witness the beautiful and aristocratic demi-mondes at the Opera ! Elizabeth was the first Englishwoman who, to excite admiration, exposed her person thus. The virgin queen wore a huge ruff certainly ; but it stuck up *behind* her ; she was *décollettée* enough in front."

"I prefer her Scottish rival—collared to her pretty neck, and sleeved to the slender wrist," said Richard Trevelyan ; "by Jove, I should not have cared for flirting with a woman who carried a fan in one hand and a hatchet in the other."

"Our ancestor, Henry Lord Lamorna, was governor of Rougemont Castle, in Devonshire, under Queen Elizabeth," said the peer pompously ; "but having married the daughter of a simple knight in Surrey, he lost Her Majesty's favour at Court, and had to live in retirement here at Rhoscadzhel. Let that mistake be a warning to you, Richard."

"It happened pretty long ago," replied Richard, laughing ; "and at forty years of age I am surely unlikely to commit an act of folly——"

"If it be not committed already ?"

—“And lose your favour, even by marrying, ‘the daughter of a simple knight.’”

“With my favour you would lose this fine estate. But give me your hand, Dick, I know you will never do aught unworthy of our good old Cornish name of Trevelyan!”

With a grand old-fashioned air—yet one full of kindness—the proud old man presented his thin white hand to his nephew, who pressed it affectionately, and then rose to withdraw.

“Whither go you, Dick, so soon?”

“Oh—anywhere, uncle,” replied the other, wearily.

“How, sir?”

“Merely into the lawn to enjoy a post-prandial cigar,” replied Richard, whose face wore an evident expression of annoyance, as he bowed and quitted the room.

“We have worried him, I fear,” said Downie, with a self-satisfied smile.

“Don’t use slang—it is bad in tone,” replied his uncle; “but I cannot make your brother out—I hope he is not deceiving us all. Gad, if I thought so—if that Montreal story should prove true——” the peer paused, and his keen blue eyes flashed with anger at the vague thoughts that occurred to him.

“Oh, do not fear, my lord,” said Downie Trevelyan, in a suave and soothing manner; “though sham diamonds often do duty for real ones.”

“What *do* you mean?” asked his uncle haughtily.

Downie only smiled, and bent over his glass of Burgundy again.

“*Neb na gare y gwayn call restoua*,” said Lord Lamorna, significantly; “I hate proverbs: but this is a good old Cornish one; “he that heeds not gain must expect loss. When do you expect your oldest boy home from India?”

“He may arrive next week, perhaps, my lord, and he will at once dutifully hasten to present himself to you.”

“He must be well up among the Lieutenants of the Hussars now?”

“Yet he means to exchange into the Infantry.”

“Why?”

“It is a matter of expedience and expense, my lord; even with forage, batta, tentage, and so forth, he finds his regiment a very extravagant one.”

“I shall give him a cheque on Coutts and Co., for I must not forget that you did me the honour to name him after *me*.”

“But you did us the greater honour in being his sponsor—and in bestowing upon him a gold sponsorial mug.”

“With the *Koithgath* of the Trevelyanys for a handle, and another perched upon the lid; well, well—he may be my suc-

cessor here—who knows, who knows,” mumbled the old man, as he prepared to take his after-dinner nap, by spreading a cambric handkerchief over his face, and Downie glided noiselessly away to the library, with a strange and unfathomable smile on his colourless face, and he muttered,—

“ I too may say—‘*the time will come!*’ ”



CHAPTER II.

RHOSCADZHEL.

ON the smooth lawn his brother was walking to and fro, with a cigar between his firm white teeth, with his heart a prey to bitter and exciting thoughts; and though Richard Trevelyan is not, as we have said, the hero of these pages, to the lawn we shall accompany him.

“ What the deuce can be the secret spring of all this intrusive solicitude upon my uncle’s part about having me married, as if I were a young girl in her third season? ” he muttered; “ I have often feared that Downie suspected me—as a lawyer, it is natural he should suspect every one of something more than he sees or knows; and yet—I have been so wary, so careful! My poor Constance—still concealment—still dissimulation for the present, and doubts of our future! No hope for us, save in the death of that old man, ever so good and kind to me. Did he really but know Constance, how sweet and gentle she is! A curse be on this silly pride of birth and fortuitous position which is our bane—this boasting of pedigree old as the days of Bran ap Llyr, the ancestor of King Arthur. By Jove, it is too absurd! ” and he laughed angrily as he tossed away his cigar and then sighed, as he surveyed the façade of the stately mansion, and cast his eyes round the spacious lawn that stretched far away in starlight and obscurity. “ And yet must I stoop to this senile folly, ” he added, half aloud; “ for ‘twere hard to see all these broad acres go to Downie’s boy, the Hussar, past me and mine! ”

The seats of the Cornish aristocracy have usually little to boast of in architecture; but the mansion of Rhoscadzhel* was an exception, being a rare specimen of a fine old Tudor dwelling, which had suffered more from the rude hand of civil war, than from “time’s effacing fingers,” and was built, tradition avers, from the famous quarry of Pencarrow, and of good Cornish freestone.

A massive iron gate, between carved pillars, each surmounted

* Cadzhel, Cornish for Castle.

by a koithgath, or wild cat, rampant—a crest of which Lord Lamorna was as vain as ever was old Bradwardine of his heraldic bears—gave access to the avenue, a long and leafy tunnel that lay between the house and the highway leading to the Land's End. The branches of the stately old elms were interlaced overhead, like the groined arches of a Gothic cathedral and a delightful promenade their shade afforded in the hot days of summer, when only a patch of blue sky, or the golden rays falling aslant, could be seen at times through their foliage.

Engrafted in the later Tudor times upon the ruins of Rhoscadzhel, of which there is still remaining the fragment of a loop-holed tower and ponderous granite arch shrouded in ivy, with its modern *porte-cochère* and vestibule floored with marble, its mullioned windows filled in with plate-glass in lieu of little lozenge-panes, its dining hall and drawing rooms lighted with gas when such was the wish of its proprietor, the mansion, though retaining all the characteristics of the days when Queen Bess held her court at Greenwich and danced before the Scottish ambassador, had nevertheless all the comforts, appliances and splendour, with which the taste and wealth of the present age could invest it.

The great dining-hall had remained almost unchanged since the days of the first Charles. Its vast chimney-piece, which rose nearly to the ceiling, was covered with marvellous scrolls and legends, and innumerable wild cats' heads among them, over all being the arms of Trevelyan of Lamorna; *gules*, a demi-horse *argent* issuing from the sea, adapted from the circumstance of one of the family swimming on horseback from the Seven Stones to the Land's End, when they were suddenly separated from the continent by a terrible inundation of the ocean, and as this dangerous reef is no less than nine miles from Scilly, where a light-ship points it out to the mariner, the feat was well worthy of being recorded, at least in heraldry.

The furniture here was quaint and old, massive and richly carved, and though the vast stone-flagged chamber, where many a Cornish cavalier has whilom drunk "confusion to Cromwell and the Rump," and where still stands the great dining table with its *dais*, where of old "the carles of low degree," had sat below the salt, is sombre and gloomy, somewhat of lightness is imparted by the splendid modern conservatory that opens off it, with marble floor and shelves of iron fret-work laden with rare and exotic plants.

It boasts of a chamber known as "the Queen's," wherein Henrietta Maria had slept one night before she fled to France, and since then no one has ever occupied the ancient bed that, like a huge catafalque, stands upon three steps in the centre of

the wainscoted room which like several others in Rhoscadzhel, has hangings of faded green tapestry, that are lifted to give entrance ; and where the hearths, intended for wood alone, have grotesque andirons in the form of the inevitable koithgath on its hind legs. And on the walls of these old chambers hung many a trophy of the past, and many a weapon of the present day, from the great two-handed sword wielded by Henry Lord Lamorna at the Battle of Pinkey down to the yeomanry sabre worn by the present peer at the coronation of George IV., a peer of whose effeminacy the said Lord Henry would have been sorely ashamed.

And many a Vandyke, Kneller, and Lely were there, with portraits of the Trevelyanos of past times, who now lay under their marble tombs in yonder little church upon the hill, where among dust and cobwebs hung their helmets, spurs, and gauntlets, and the iron mace of one Launcelot Trevelyan, who was a man of vast stature ; and it is as great a source of wonder to the village children as the rickety ruin of a gilded coach which at certain times is drawn forth to the lawn and aired carefully, being that in which the grandfather of the present peer brought home his bride in patches and powder, and it is supposed to be the first vehicle of the kind ever seen in the duchy of Cornwall. Thus, as Richard Pencarrow Trevelyan thought over all these possessions with their traditional and family interests, of which, by one ill-natured stroke of the pen, his proud uncle might deprive him and his heirs for ever, a bitter sigh escaped him.

Beyond the quaint façade of the ancient house, from the mullioned windows of which, half hidden by ivy and wild roses, there streamed out many a light into the darkness, his eyes wandered to the fertile fields, all bare stubble now, to the wide open moor overlooked by many a wooded *tor*, and to the beautiful lawn, in the centre of which stands one of those wonderful *logan-stones*, so peculiar to Cornwall and Brittany, a ponderous, spheroidal mass of granite, so exquisitely balanced that it may be oscillated by the touch even of a woman's hand ; and as he turned away to indulge in deeper reverie by the shore of the adjacent sea, he raised his right hand and his glistening eyes to the stars, as if some vow, as yet unuttered, was quivering on his tongue.

“Yes?” he exclaimed, “please God and pray God, the time will come ; but *not* as my good uncle, and *not*, as the careful Downie, anticipate. Marriage ! how little do they know how, in the great lottery of life, my *kismet*—as we used to say in India—has been fixed—irrevocably fixed !”

CHAPTER III.

THE ALARM BELL.

THE season was autumn now, and on the succeeding day—the last he meant to spend at Rhoscadzhel for some time at least—Richard Trevelyan appeared in the breakfast parlour again in shooting costume, with a scarlet shirt having an open collar, and with a brown leather shot-belt over his shoulder; while his uncle, who, even when at his slender morning repast, in his elaborately flowered dressing-gown, wore accurately fitting pale kid gloves on his shrivelled hands, for such things were a necessity of the old lord's existence; thus he glanced again with an air of annoyance at the dress worn by his eldest nephew, as he considered it a solecism, decidedly in bad taste, and that something more was due to his own presence.

Downie's costume, a fashionable morning coat came more near his lordship's ideas of propriety.

Mr. Jasper Funnel, in accurate black, was at the side-table, to slice down the cold meat, pour out the coffee from its silver urn into the beautiful Wedgwood cups, and to carve the grouse and other pies; for Cornwall is peculiarly the land of that species of viand, as there the denizens make pies of everything eatable, squab-pies, pilchard-pies, muggety-pies, and so forth.

"I heard last evening the new chime of bells you have put up in Lamorna Church," said Richard, as he seated himself and attacked a plate of grouse, the recent spoil of his own gun; "how pleasantly they sound. Who rings them?"

"I cannot say—never inquired," replied the old peer, testily; "I can only tell you one thing, Richard."

"And that is—"

"They were *wrong* out of my pocket by the vestry."

At this little quip, Downie obsequiously and applaudingly laughed as loudly as he was ever known to do, and just as if he had never heard it before.

"However, I need not grudge the poor people their chime of bells; I am rich enough to afford them more than that, and occupying as we do a good slice of this *Land of Tin*, for so the Phoenicians named this Cornish peninsula of ours as early as the days of Solomon, we have its credit to maintain; but bring us home a well-born and handsome bird, Dick, and I shall have the bells rung till they fly to pieces—by Jove I will! Only, as I hinted last night, let her be worthy to represent those who lie under their marble tombs in that old church of Lamorna; for

there are bones there that would shrink in their leaden coffins if aught plebeian were laid beside them."

Richard shrugged his shoulders, and glanced round him with impatience.

"Let us look forward, my dear uncle," said he; in this age of progress all men do; and of what account or avail can a dead ancestry be?"

Downie smiled faintly, and Lord Lamorna frowned in the act of decapitating an egg, for to his ears this sounded as rank heresy or treason against the state.

"By heavens! nephew Richard, you talk like a Red Republican. With these socialistic views of equality, and so forth, I fear you will never shine in the Upper House."

"I have no desire to do so; you see how simple my tastes are—"

"In dress decidedly too much so."

"And how happy and content I am to lead the life of a quiet country gentleman; and have done so ever since I left the Cornish Light Infantry."

"Your demands upon my pocket are certainly so moderate, that I cannot think you are playing me false, Dick," said the peer, with a pleasant smile; "egad, if I thought you were doing so, I'd have you before the Mayor of Halgaver, as our Cornish folks say!"

"Trust me, my good uncle," replied Richard Trevelyan, with a glistening eye, and laying a hand caressingly on the old man's shoulder, as he arose and adjusted his shot-belt; "and now I go to have a farewell shot on the moors."

"Why a farewell shot? you have been here barely a fortnight."

"Nevertheless, I must leave Rhoscadzhel to-morrow."

"Positively?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Pardon me," continued Lamorna drily; "but may we inquire for where?"

"Oxford—and then town after, perhaps."

"Oxford—and town too," replied his uncle, testily; "the last time you left this for London, if General Trecarrel was right, you were seen for a month after in his neighbourhood; and, if his story were true—and I dare not doubt it—you did not get beyond the border of Cornwall—and were certainly not so far as Devonshire."

"Trecarrel was, I hope, mistaken," urged Richard.

"I hope so, too."

Richard's face was pale, and, to conceal his emotion, he stooped and caressed his favourite pointer, which had bounded

in when the butler opened the door ; and soon recovering from his little agitation—whatever its secret source might be—he politely and affectionately bade his uncle “good-bye for the present,” nodded to the silent and observant Downie, took a double-barrelled breech-loader from the gun-room and sallied forth, unattended by gamekeepers, desiring quite as much to indulge in reverie and enjoy a solitary ramble, as to have a shot at a passing bird.

To Richard it seemed that he had read a strangely keen, weird and unfathomable expression in his uncle's eyes, as they followed his departing steps on this particular morning—an expression which, somehow, haunted him.

The season, we have said, was now autumn, and a tender, mellow tone rested over all the landscape ; Richard Trevlyan was fond of the strange, wild district—the land of old tradition, of bold and varied scenery—amid which his youth and so much of his manhood had been passed, and he looked around him from time to time with admiring eyes and an enthusiastic heart.

A soft warm shower had fallen that morning early, refreshing the fading September leaves in the belts of coppice that girt the upland slopes, and in the orchards, where the ripe golden apples were dropping amid the thick sward below. Above the purple, and often desolate moors which are so characteristic of Cornish scenery, and where the small breed of horses, the little black cattle and sharp-nosed sheep of the province were grazing, the wooded *tors* or hills stood boldly up in the distance, their foliage in most instances presenting many varied tints. There were the brown madder, the crisped chestnut, and the fading beech, the more faded green of the old Cornish elm, and the russet fern below, from amid which at every step he took the birds whirred up in coveys ; while Richard, lost in reverie—the result of his uncle's remarks of late—never emptied a barrel at them, but walked slowly on looking round him from time to time, and filled with thoughts that were all his own as yet.

The place where he loitered was very lonely : here and there a gray lichen-spotted druidical monolith stood grimly up amid the silent waste ; in the distance might be seen the gray expanse of the ocean, or some bleak-looking houses slated with blue, as they usually are in Devon and Cornwall, or perhaps some of those poorer huts, which, like wigwams, have cob-walls ; i.e. are built of earth, mud, and straw, beaten and pounded together, just as they might have been in the days of Bran the son of Llyr, or when Arthur dwelt in Tintagel.

Richard Trevlyan threw himself upon a grassy bank, and his pointer, doubtless surprised by his neglect of all sport, lay be-

side him with eyes of wonder and tongue out-lolled. In the distance, about a mile or so away, Trevelyan could see Rhoscadzhel House shining in the morning sunlight ; and again, as on the preceding evening, he looked around with a bitter smile upon tor and moorland, and on the wondrous druid monoliths that stand up here and there on the bleak hill sides, each and all of them having their own quaint name and grim old legend.

How came each to be there ? "Without patent rollers ; nay, without the simplest mechanical contrivances of modern times, how was so huge a mass transported to yonder desolate and wind-swept height ? How many yoke of oxen, how many straining scores of men must it have taken to erect the least of them ! What submission to authority, what servile or superstitious fear must have animated the workers ! No drover's whip would have urged to such a task ; no richest guerdon could have repaid the toil ; yet there the wonder stands !"

And some such thoughts as these floated through the mind of Richard, as his eyes wandered from a cromlech or slab that rested on three great stones, to a vast *maen* or rock pillar, that might be coeval with the days when Jacob set up such a stone to witness his covenant with Laban.

"Shall I ever wander here with Constance—and if so, *when*?" thought he ; "assuredly not while my uncle lives ; but his death—how can I contemplate it, when he is so good, so kind, so tender, and so true to me ? Oh, let me not anticipate that."

How often in autumn, in the gloomy mornings of November, had he pursued the fox over these desolate moors, often breakfasting by candle-light in his red coat on a hunting morning, to the great boredom of old Jasper Funnel ?

What joy it would be to gallop over that breezy wind-swept moor, with Constance by his side ! To walk with her through yonder dense old thicket, and tell her that every tree and twig therein were her own ; to drive by yonder cliff, Tol Pedn Penwith, the western boundary of a beautiful bay, and where in the summer evening the forty Isles of Scilly seemed to be cradled in the glory of the western sun ; to show her all these places with which he was so familiar, and perhaps to tell their children in the years to come—for all Richard's habits and tastes were alike gentle and domestic—the old Cornish legends of Arthur's castle at Tintagel, of the magic well of St. Keyne, and of Treg-eagle the giant—the bugbear of all Cornish little people ; the melancholy monster or fiend, who, according to traditions still believed in, haunts the Dozmare Pool, from whence he hurled the vast granite blocks, known as his "quoits," upon the coast westward of Penzance Head ; the deep dark Pool, his dwelling

place, is said to be unfathomable and the resort of other evil spirits.

Desolate and begirt by arid and dreary hills, it presents an aspect of gloomy horror ; and then when the winter storms sweep the moorland wastes, and the miners at the Land's End, deep, deep down in mines below the sea, hear the enormous boulders dashed by it on the flinty shore overhead, above all can be heard the howling of Tregeagle ! For ages he has been condemned to the task of emptying the Dozmare Pool by a tiny limpet-shell, and his cries are uttered in despair of the hopelessness of the drudgery assigned him by the devil, who in moments of impatience hunts him round the tarn, till he flies to the Roche Rocks fifteen miles distant, and finds respite by placing his hideous head through the painted window of a ruined chapel, as aumpkin might through a horse-collar ; for these, and a thousand such stories as these, are believed in Cornwall, nor can even the whistle of the railway from Plymouth to Penzance scare them away.

Richard Trevlyan was smiling when he remembered how often he and Downie, when loving little brothers and playfellows, had been scared in their cribs at night by stories of Tregeagle ; and of that other mighty giant who lies buried beneath Carn Brea, where his clenched skeleton hand, now converted into a block of granite (having five distinct parts, like a thumb and fingers) protrudes through the turf.

He could recal the dark hours, when as fair-haired children they had cowered together in one of the tapestried rooms of Rhoscadzhel, and clasped each other's hands and necks in fear of those hobgoblins which people the very rock and cavern, and even the very air of Cornwall. Downie was a man now, legal in bearing, and cold-blooded in heart. Richard had painful doubts of him, and remembered that, strangely enough, his hand *alone* had always failed to rock the logan-stone in the lawn before Rhoscadzhel, and such monuments of antiquity have, according to Mason, the properties of an ordeal—the test of truth and probity :

“ Behold yon huge
And unhewn sphere of living adamant,
Which, poised by magic, rests its central weight
On yonder pointed rock : firm as it seems,
Such is its strange and virtuous property,
It moves obsequious to the gentlest touch
Of him whose heart is pure ; but to a *traitor*,
Tho' e'en a giant's prowess nerved his arm,
It stands as fixed as Snowdon ! ”

Even the childish hands of his little daughter Gartha could rock the logan-stone, when Downie's failed to do so. Why was

this? Was there indeed any truth in the ancient test of integrity and purity of heart; or was it but an engine of religious imposition? And now amid these unpleasant speculations, there came to the loiterer's ear the tolling of a distant bell.

He started up, and listened.

It was, beyond a doubt, the house-bell of Rhoscadzhel, and was being rung violently and continuously, for the breeze brought the notes distinctly over the furzy waste.

What could have happened? Fire—or was he wanted in haste? Was his uncle indisposed; were his fears, his hopes and wishes, though blended with sorrow, to be realised at last?

His breath came thick and painfully, and he remembered with something of foreboding—for his Cornish breeding rendered him superstitious and impressionable—that as he had passed Lamorra church that morning, he had seen, on the rough *lichstones* at the entrance to the sequestered churchyard, a coffin rested prior to interment, while the soft sad psalmody of those who had borne it thither—a band of hardy miners—floated through the still and ambient air; for the custom of bearing the dead to their last resting place with holy songs—a usage in the East, as old as the fourth century—is still observed in Cornwall, that land of quaint traditions and picturesque old memories.

Springing to his feet, Richard Trevelyan discharged both barrels of his gun into the air, and hurried in the direction of the manor house.

As he drew nearer, the sonorous clangour of the great bell, which was now rung at intervals, but with great vigour, continued to increase, adding to the surprise and tumult of his heart, and the perturbation of his spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

POWDERED WITH TEARS.

A MOUNTED footman, who approached him at full speed, pulled up for a moment and respectfully touched his hat, for he was one of the Lamorna household.

“What is the matter?” asked Richard.

“Oh, sir—oh, Mr. Richard—my lord is taken very ill.”

“Ill—my uncle?”

“He is quite senseless, and Mr. Downie Trevelyan has sent me for the doctor.”

"Then ride on and lose no time," replied Richard, as he hastened to the house, where he found confusion and dismay predominant, the servants hovering in the vestibule, conversing in whispers and listening at the library door, while Jasper Funnel and Mrs. Duntreath, the old housekeeper (a lineal descendant of the Dolly Duntreath, so well-known in Cornwall), were mingling their sighs and regrets for the loss of so good a master.

"Where is my uncle?" asked Richard, impetuously.

"In the lib—lib—library," sobbed the housekeeper, with her black silk apron at her eyes, and as Richard advanced, Jasper Funnel softly opened the door. The favourite nephew entered the long, spacious, and splendid apartment, which occupied nearly the entire length of one of the wings of Rhoscadzhel, its shelves of dark wainscot filled by books in rare and magnificent bindings, with white marble busts of the great and learned men of classical antiquity looking calmly down on what was passing below.

The fire-place was deep and old; but a seacoal fire was burning cheerily in the bright steel modern grate; and as if he was in a dream, seeing the far-stretching lawn, with its tufts of waving fern and stately lines of elm and oak, as he passed the tall windows noiselessly on the soft Turkey carpet, Richard drew hastily near the great arm-chair, in which his uncle was seated, dead—stone-dead, with Downie, somewhat pale and disordered in aspect, bending over him!

The old man had suddenly passed away—disease of the heart, as it proved eventually, had assailed him while seated at his writing-table.

On Richard's entrance and approach, Downie hurriedly took from the table and thrust into his pocket, a document which looked most legally and suspiciously like a "last will and testament;" but quick though the action, Richard could perceive that the document, whatever it was, had no signatures of any kind.

Richard knelt by his uncle's side; he felt his pulses; they had ceased to beat; his heart was cold and still, and there came no sign of breath upon the polished surface of the mirror he held before the fallen jaw; with something of remorse Richard thought:—

"No later than this morning I deceived him—and he loved me so—was ever my friend and second father!—I thought," he added aloud, to Downie, "that his eyes wore an unusual expression this morning—a weird, keen, farseeing kind of look, such as I never read in them before."

"I fancied that I perceived some such expression myself, and consequently, at his years, was the less alarmed, or shall I say shocked, when in the very act of speaking to me, a sudden spasm came over his features—a deep sigh, almost a faint cry escaped

him, and he sank back in his chair, when just about to write. See, there is the pen on the floor, exactly where it fell from his relaxed fingers."

Richard's honest eyes were filled with tears, and mechanically he picked up the pen and laid it on the desk.

"Writing, say you, Downie; and what was he writing?"

"Oh, I cannot say—a letter to his steward, I believe."

"But—I see no letter."

"He was just about to commence it," replied Downie, whose usually pale face coloured a little.

"And that paper you pocketed in such haste, Downie, what was it?"

"Nothing, Richard, that can concern you (by-the-by, you are Lord Lamorna now!) or that fair one whose portrait you exhibit so ostentatiously just now."

"Richard started, alike at the title so suddenly accorded to him by his brother, and at the reference to the portrait, for in the confusion or haste, as he bent over his dead uncle, a little miniature, which he wore at a ribbon round his neck, depicting a very beautiful dark-eyed woman, had slipped from his vest, and with an exclamation of annoyance, he hastened to conceal it.

"Who is the lady, Richard?" asked Downie.

"As yet, that must remain my secret," replied Richard; "a little time, my dear fellow, and we shall have no mysteries among us."

Downie, secretly, was not ill-pleased by this diversion, in which Richard forgot the subject of the paper.

The doctor soon came—a village practitioner—fussy and full of importance; but nevertheless skilful; and he decided that disease of the heart—a malady under which, though ignorant of its existence, the deceased had long laboured—had proved the immediate cause of death. The poor shrivelled remains of the proud old lord were conveyed to the principal bed-room of the mansion, and there laid in a species of state, upon a four-posted bed, that rose from a daïs, and was all draped with black. His coronet and Order of the Bath, together with that of St. Anne, which he received when ambassador in Russia, were deposited at his feet upon a crimson velvet cushion, that was tasseled with gold; while two tall footmen in complete livery with long canes draped with crape, mounted guard beside the coffin day and night, to their own great disgust and annoyance, till the time of the funeral, of which Richard took the entire charge: and which, in a spirit of affection and good taste, he resolved should be in all respects exactly what the deceased peer would have wished it to be.

The features of the latter became, for a time, young and

beautiful in their manliness and perfect regularity, while all the lines engraven there by Time were smoothed out, if not completely effaced.

"How like our father, as I can remember him, he looks!" whispered Downie, more softened than usual, by the hallowing presence of death.

But Richard was thinking of another face whom the dead man resembled—a young and beloved face to him.

"Denzil did you say?" he stammered.

"I said our father," replied Downie, sharply.

"True, he died young," was the confused reply.

"Your mind wanders, surely?" said Downie, with a dark and inexplicable expression in his now averted face; but Richard saw it not, he was simply taking a farewell glance of one who had loved him so well; his manly heart was soft, and his dark-blue eyes were full with the tears of honest affection and gratitude.

So Audley Lord Lamorna was dead, and all now turned to Richard as their new and future master; all the blinds in Rhoscadzhel were drawn down by order of Mrs. Duntreath, and all went about on tip-toe or spoke in subdued voices, especially Downie, who in his heart thought that Richard was spending "far too much in ostrich feathers, crimson coffins, and other mummery," among undertakers, and heraldic painters, too; but he was more politic than to say so—even to his wife, who, with her daughter Gartha, a pretty girl in her teens, had been on a visit to General Trecarrel, and now duly arrived to act as mistress of the mansion, *pro tem.*, during the solemnities of which it was to be the scene.

She was warmly welcomed by Richard Trevelyan; she was his only brother's wife, and he had none of his own to take her place there—as yet.

A peevish and foolish woman of fashion, who had once possessed undoubted beauty, Mrs. Downie Trevelyan was generally treated as a kind of cypher now by her husband; but nevertheless he consulted her at times, on certain matters of common interest. She still clung tenaciously to the tradition of her former beauty, and sought to retain it by the aid of pearl powder, the faintest indication of rouge perhaps, and by the prettiest of matronly head-dresses made of the costliest lace. She was always languid, somewhat dreary, and spent most of her time with a novel in one hand, and a magnificent little bottle of ether, or some strong perfume, in the other. To Richard her society was decidedly a bore; but at this crisis he was full of business, and occupied by a depth of thought that was apparent to all.

Six tall servants in mourning scarfs, and in the livery of the

Trevelyan's, bore upon their shoulders the crimson velvet coffin containing the remains of the late lord, to the vault where his forefathers lay, and where many of them had been interred by torchlight, in times long past.

There was something feudal, stately, and solemn in the aspect of the procession, when between two lines of all the tenantry, standing bare-headed, it wound down the old avenue, where the leaves were almost as thick, the sun as bright, and the birds singing as merrily as they might have been when Lord Launcelot rode there by the Queen's bridle, or when he and his cavaliers fled from Fairfax to seek shelter in Trewoose ; and so his descendant Audley was laid at last, where so many of his predecessors lie side by side, " ranged in mournful order and in a kind of silent pomp," each coffin bearing the names, titles and arms of its mouldering occupant.

Pondering on *who* might stand here when his turn came to be lowered down there, Richard, the new lord, stood at the head of the tomb, pale, and with more emotion than met the eye ; Downie stood on his right hand, and the heir of the latter, well bronzed by the sun of India, on his left, three of his younger brothers, held with a ribbon. Their old friend, General Trecarrel, stood grimly and erect at the foot. The vault was closed and the body of Audley, tenth Lord Lamorna, that frail tenement, which he had petted and pampered, of which he had been so careful and so vain, for some seventy years, was left to the worms at last !

The assemblage dispersed, and the world went on as usual.

The bell of the village church, which had all the morning tolled minute strokes, ceased ; and after a time the new chimes rang out a merry peal in honour of his successor. It was in Cornwall as at St. Cloud ; *le Roi est mort—vive le roi !*

The old general, who had no fancy for a mansion of gloom, departed, and took back with him Downie's son Audley, a jolly young subaltern, whom we shall soon meet elsewhere.

But prior to this departure, there had been the reading of the will, an affair of great solemnity, in the library, the same apartment where the late lord died ; and his solicitors, Messrs. Gorbelly and Culverhole, a fat and a lean pair of lawyers, felt all their vulgar importance on the occasion.

There were a few handsome presents to old and faithful servants, including Jasper Funnel and Mrs. Duntreath (whose sobs became somewhat intrusive), and Richard found himself Lord of Rhoscadzhel and Lamorna, with an unfettered fortune of thirty thousand per annum ; while Downie had a bequest of less than the third of that sum, together with some jewellery, including the Russian diamond ring for his wife and daughter Gartha.

So whatever had been the object or the tenor of that document

which the astute barrister had so evidently prepared, and which he had thrust into his pocket so hastily and awkwardly on that eventful morning, Richard was as safely installed in the estates as in his hereditary title; and the moment he found himself alone he became immersed in letter-writing.

Opening the crimson morocco blotting pad which his uncle had last used, and which had his coronet and crest, the wild-cat, stamped in gold thereon, he saw some words written in his brother's hand, and these, on investigation proved to be, "This is the last will and testament of me, L—" (doubtless Lord Lamorna); further on, as if at the bottom of the page, he could detect the name of "Porthellick," and a dark flush of passion crimsoned the face of Richard. He thought again of the document he had seen in Downie's hand ; their uncle could certainly never have signed it, but some painful doubts—added to intense sorrow for their existence—grew strong in Richard's heart, which was a true and generous one.

"My dear Constance—my long suffering darling!" he muttered, almost aloud ; "the day is now near when all your doubts and my dissimulation to the world shall end. Thank God, the time has almost come."

And he rode forth, to post with his own hand a letter he had written.

He was barely gone ere Downie, who had been quietly observing his motions, also made an investigation of the blotting pad which Richard had just closed, and therein he saw what seemed to be the address of a recent letter. He held the pink sheet between his eyes and the light, and read clearly enough, "Mrs. Devereaux, Porthellick Cottage."

And the lawyer smiled sourly, but with great uneasiness, nevertheless, and he muttered aloud,

"I had but vague suspicions before—and now all my knowledge has come too late—too late!"

"I am so sorry to hear you say so, dear," said his graceful little wife, the rustle of whose fashionable mourning suit he had been too much pre-occupied to hear, as she glided into the library, in search of one of the many uncut novels that now littered the tables ; "sorry chiefly for the sake of our dear Audley, and Gartha, and the other little ones."

"You know to what I refer—the succession ; it may not be so hopeless or irreparable as we think."

"But your uncle died with his will unchanged."

"True ; I pressed upon him lately my belief that Richard had formed that—of which he had a horror so great—a *mésalliance* —in fact, a low or improper attachment for one beneath us in rank and name. My uncle's fury became great, and to take

advantage of the time, I placed before him a will, leaving all his estates; as he had a hundred times threatened to do, to me and mine. I had the document ready written, and placed it before him; but as fate would have it, in his pride, fury, and resentment, a spasm seized the old man, and he fell back dying, actually with the pen in his hand, after I had dipped it in that silver inkstand and placed it between his fingers."

"How extremely unfortunate!" said Mrs. Downie Trevelyan, placing her scent-bottle languidly to her little pink nostrils.

"Unfortunate? It was a narrow chance by which to lose thirty thousand a year!" said Downie, grinding his teeth, while his eyes gleamed like two bits of grey glass in moonlight. "There is some mystery about Richard's life; moreover, he wears a woman's miniature at his neck."

"Young—is she?"

"Well—yes—she seems so."

"And pretty?" added Mrs. Downie, glancing at herself in a mirror.

"Very."

"His intended, perhaps?"

"I hope she is not more than that; but time must soon show now."

And over the porte-cochere of Rhoscadzhel there now hung a vast lozenge-shaped hatchment or funeral escutcheon, the sight of which would have delighted him, whose memory it was meant to honour, being the achievement of a bachelor peer, representing the arms of Lamorna in a shield complete—the demi-horse *argent* of the Trevellysans rising from the sea; over all, the baron's coronet, crest, motto and mantling, collared by the Orders of the Bath and St. Anne; and after some old fashion, retained still only in Germany, Scotland, and France, the herald-painter had depicted at each corner a death-head, while all the black interstices were *powdered with tears*.



CHAPTER V.

PORHELICK VILLA.

MORE than forty miles distant from Rhoscadzhel, on that part of the Cornish coast which is washed by the waves of the Bristol Channel, at a place named Porthellick, or the Cove of Willows, was a beautiful white-walled villa, built in the Greek style of architecture, with an Ionic portico of six carved and painted wooden pillars. Its windows opened in the French

fashion, and descended to the floor ; luxuriant creepers, jasmines, and sweet briar, were trained on green trellis-work around it, and rare plants of gorgeous colours grew in stone vases, which were placed in a double row along the smooth gravelled terrace, from which the basement of the cottage rose—for the villa was a cottage in character, being but a one storeyed dwelling, though spacious and handsome, and having a noble conservatory and coach-house and stabling, and an approach of half a mile in length, bordered by a double line of those magnificent willows from which the place took its name, and affording, from the principal windows in front, an ample view of the sea, with ever and anon, a white sail lingering in the dim blue distance, or a passing steamer, with its pennant of smoke, streaming astern, as it sped towards Ireland or the Isle of Man.

On the evening of that day when Lord Lamorna died so suddenly, a lady was standing under the portico of this house, looking anxiously, not seaward, but inland, towards the willow avenue, by which her residence was approached from the road that leads by Stratton, among the hills, towards Camelford and Wadebridge, near the rocky valley of Hanter-Gantick.

The lady looked repeatedly at her watch, consulted a railway time-table, and entered the house, only to return to her post, and bend her eyes in anxious gaze along the avenue.

Mrs. Devereaux, for it was she, was young-looking—marvelously so for her years; she seemed to be quite a girl still ; yet she was fully four-and-thirty, and the mother of two children. This youthful appearance doubtless arose from her very petite and slender figure ; her strictly fashionable style of dress, and the piquante beauty that shone in the minute features of her charming little face. Her eyes were dark, yet full of light and sparkle, though their long lashes imparted a great softness of expression. Her eyebrows were very dark and well-defined—some might have deemed them too much so ; but they imparted great character to her face. Her mouth and chin were perfect ; her teeth like those of a child ; and over all, her face, figure, and bearing, even to every motion of her hands and feet, Mrs. Devereaux was exquisitely ladylike.

"At last—at last they come!" she exclaimed ; "and yonder is my dear, dear Denzil, whom I have not seen for so many, many months," she added, as her eyes filled with tears, and her soft cheek flushed with all a mother's joy.

As she uttered her thoughts aloud, a little basket-phæton, drawn by two lovely cream-coloured Shetland ponies, was seen bowling down the avenue of pale green willows ; a young lady was handling the ribbons of these Lilliputian steeds in a very masterly style ; and beside her sat a young man, attired in

fashionable travelling costume, who was alternately waving his cap and a newspaper, which he flourished so vigorously, that the sleek brindled cattle grazing in the clover meadows close by, lifted their great brown eyes as if inquiringly, while the little drag, with its varnished wheels flashing, dashed along towards the villa, the walls of which shone white as snow in the evening sunlight.

The phaeton was reined up before the portico, when a handsome lad of eighteen, with fine regular features, dark blue—almost black—eyes, and short fair curly hair, sprang out, and was instantly clasped to his mother's breast.

"Oh, mamma—we have such news for you!" exclaimed the young lady, who seemed an exact reproduction of Mrs. Devereaux in height and face though barely seventeen, with dark eyes and hair; "oh, such news!" she added, in high, girlish excitement, as she tossed her whip and reins to a groom who came promptly from the stable-yard, Derrick Braddon, once a soldier in Richard's regiment—

"Surely mamma knows all," said the youth; "have you not seen the *Gazette*?"

"*Gazette*?" repeated Mrs. Devereaux, growing very pale, as she led her son caressingly into the little morning-room, where a hasty repast had been prepared for him and his sister, and which opened off a handsome little vestibule, hung with fox-brushes crossed, the trophies of many a hunting-day, brought home by his father, "Captain Devereaux."

"Denzil is now an officer, mamma," said the young girl, throwing off her hat and looking admiringly at her brother; "I was just in time to meet him at the train."

"Yes, mamma—I was yesterday gazetted to an ensigncy in the Cornish Light Infantry,—got leave from Sandhurst, and at once came right slick down here. Oh, how proud papa will be—is he not here?"

"No," replied Mrs. Devereaux, faintly; "and how does your name appear in the *Gazette*?"

"Here it is, mamma, dear," replied the youth, pointing to the paper he had been flourishing, and feeling proud to see his name, for the first time in print. "'Cornish Light Infantry; Lieutenant Audley Trevelyan, from the 14th Hussars, to be lieutenant, vice Gascoigne, killed in action. Denzil Devereaux, gentleman cadet, from the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, to be ensign, vice Foster, deceased.' And now, mamma, I am done at last with all the boredom of Euclid and fortification, Trigonometry, and all the rest of it."

"And you will soon be done with poor mamma, too!"

"Nay, mamma, dear; that can never, never be!" replied the

lad, as he threw his arms round her neck and kissed away the tears that were already oozing from her long and beautiful eyelashes ; "but I do so wish papa were at home—I have so much to tell, and so much to ask him !"

"Denzil—Devereaux ?" said the mother, ponderingly, and as if to herself.

"Yes, mamma ; and few fellows at Sandhurst had more marks opposite their names than Denzil Devereaux, for I worked hard that I might choose my own regiment ; so I chose the 32nd because I am a kind of Cornish man, and because it was papa's old corps. Oh, how pleased he will be !"

"And where is the regiment stationed now ?" asked Mrs. Devereaux, in a low voice.

"In India."

"India ?" she repeated, mechanically, as if that separation, which is but as a living death, had already begun.

"I wonder who the Audley Trevelyan figuring along with me in the *Gazette*, may be. It is a pure Cornish name."

His mother was weeping now, and Sybil, who had hitherto been silent, began to do so from sympathy ; for already, so we have said, the pang of the coming parting was felt, and the maternal heart was wrung at the thought of a long and doubtful separation from her only son—her Denzil—whom she deemed beautiful as Apollo, and clever as the admirable Crichton ; for the Overland Route had not been opened, there was no electric cable to India, and its nearest point was distant a six months' journey by sea round the Cape ; and so, full of aching thoughts that her children could not share—thoughts that must be all her own till her husband returned—poor Mrs. Devereaux could only fold her son to her breast and weep till the young man's military and boyish enthusiasm became dulled, and his naturally warm and affectionate heart grew full with a perplexity that was akin to remorse, for seeking to leave her side and push his way in the world as a soldier. Yet that was the only career his father had ever indicated to him.

"A letter from papa—our dear papa !" exclaimed Sybil, glad to cause some diversion from the gathering gloom, as she caught the missive from the hand of the village postman, who appeared outside the open window.

"I wonder if he has heard of my appointment," surmised Denzil, his thoughts reverting to their old channel.

"It is sealed and edged with black !" exclaimed Sybil ; "and—how singular—it bears the Penzance postmark !"

"How is this, mamma—I thought papa was in London ?" asked Denzil.

Mrs. Devereaux trembled violently, as she tore open the letter, and muttering an excuse hastily left the room with it.

"What's up?" said the ex-cadet, as he applied himself to the sherry decanter; "by Jove, Sybil, this is a strange way of receiving papa's letter. Who is dead, I wonder—I hope there is nothing wrong with him, anyway!"

"Oh, can he have met with an accident?"

"Scarcely, as the letter is written by himself; but to be at Penzance when we all thought he was in town—very odd, isn't it?"



CHAPTER VI.

RICHARD'S MYSTERY.

To explain much that the reader may have begun to suspect or misjudge, we must now go back a few years, into the private life of Richard Trevelyan.

When stationed with his regiment in Montreal he had made, at some public assembly, the acquaintance of Constance Devereaux, then a girl fresh from school. He was fascinated by her rare beauty, and a certain *espiergerie* of manner, which the thoughts and cares of future years eventually crushed out of her; and she, on her part, was dazzled by the attentions of a handsome and wealthy young officer; for Richard being his uncle's favourite nephew and heir, received from him a handsome yearly allowance, in addition to that which he inherited from his father.

Unfortunately Constance Devereaux, with all her beauty and accomplishments, was the daughter of one who would have been deemed of very humble caste indeed, if judged by the standard applied to such matters at Rhoscadzhel. The girl loved him passionately and blindly, and little foreseeing all such a step would cost her in the end, she consented to a private marriage; so they were united in secret by Père Latour, the catholic curé of the chapel of St. Mary, near Montreal; an acolyte of the chapel and Richard's servant, a soldier named Derrick Braddon, being the only witnesses.

The marriage was duly registered in the books of the little church, and an attested copy was lodged with the curé who performed the ceremony; but as the regiment was ordered soon after to another colony, it was left in his hands for the time.

Richard obtained leave of absence, and soon after, much to his uncle's surprise, left the army by selling out, and led a kind

of wandering life on the Continent, taking his wife's name of Devereaux, the better to conceal from the proud, and as yet unsuspecting old lord, the *mésalliance* he had formed—a union, however, of which he had never cause to repent, for his wife was gentle and tender, and possessed many brilliant mental qualities; but well did Richard know that if that union were discovered, the immense fortune, which was at Lord Lamorna's entire disposal, would be left, if not altogether to Downie, to others, and past himself and the heirs of his line; and that such a calamity should *not* occur he became more anxious and more solicitous after the birth of two children, a son whom he named Denzil, after his own father, and a daughter, Sybil, born to them since their wanderings in Italy.

Many difficulties attended the course of this secret matrimonial life! Even in their continental travels, when seeking the most secluded places, stray English tourists would come suddenly upon them if they ventured near a table d'hôte; once or twice an old brother officer, or other people who knew or recognised in the so-called Captain Devereaux, Richard Trevelyan; and then mysterious nods or knowing smiles were exchanged, and odd whispers went abroad in the clubs of London and elsewhere—innuendoes that would have withered up the heart of Constance had she heard them.

She knew all that *might* be suspected, and felt that the positions of herself and her children, were alike false and liable to misconstruction; that malignant scandal might be busy with the names of them all. But the die was cast now, and she had but to suffer and endure; to pray and to wait the death of the poor old man who was so kind to her husband, and who loved him so well—yet not well enough to forgive—had he ever discovered it—the deception which had been practised upon him and upon society.

Repining in secret, sorrowing for the falsehood of her position, knowing that her husband, the father of her children, passed in the world as an eligible bachelor, the object of many a designing mother, open to the attentions, the coquettices and captivations of their daughters, aware that he resided with her only by stealth and under another name than his own, Constance had indeed much to endure, though rewarded in some degree therefor, to see her children growing up in health and beauty, each a reproduction of their parents, for Denzil had all the personal attributes of his father, with much higher mental qualities, while the soft-eyed Sybil, possessed all the dark beauty, the *petite* figure and lady-like grace of Constance herself.

The latter, we have said, was but the daughter of a Canadian trader; yet amid all the ease and luxury with which her husband's

ample means and tender love supplied her, there were times, when she could not but murmur in her heart at the anomaly of her situation, so different from the honest security of her father's humble home, and her native pride revolted against it; and with this pride there grew a species of shame, which she felt to be totally unmerited, and then she felt an utter loathing for the very name of Lord Lamorna (though it should one day be borne by her own husband as being the cause of all her secret suffering, her dread of the present and doubt of the future).

On the education of their children, Richard, who doted on them, had spared nothing. Both were highly accomplished, and wherever they had wandered they had the most talented masters that wealth could procure. Now Denzil had taken the highest prizes at Sandhurst and was gazetted to a Regiment of the Line, and was going forth into the world under the false name of Devereaux!

How was this to be altered—how explained and rectified?

A necessity for being much about Rhoscadzhel, as being the heir to the estates and as his uncle's years increased, had compelled Richard Trevelyan to be more often present in his native county than he had hitherto been; hence, he had settled his secret ties in the pretty little villa of Porthellick, at what he conceived to be a safe distance of some forty miles or so from the residence of Lord Lamorna.

In and about that villa he was simply known as "Captain Devereaux," and as he had almost entirely relinquished hunting and field sports—save an occasional shot at a bird—and when there lived a retired and secluded life; and as his wife and children seemed to live for themselves and him only, making friends with few save the poor and ailing, time glided by, and the mystery of Richard's career was never fully laid bare.

For those there are in this world (and his uncle was one) who would have pardoned Richard making Constance Devereaux his mistress, and yet would mockingly have resented his making her a wedded wife!

Lamorna's friend General Trecarrel—the representative of one of the oldest families in Cornwall—who lived near Porthellick, had met Richard on horseback more than once in the vicinity of that place, when he was supposed to be in London, Paris, or elsewhere, and the mention of these circumstances caused Mr. Downie Trevelyan, who, as we have shown, had a keen personal interest in the matter, to prosecute certain inquiries in that part of the duchy, and the result led him to believe that the Captain Devereaux who occasionally resided at the Grecian Villa in the Willow Cove, and his irreproachable brother Richard, were one and the same person!

If it were so, the character of the lady must be—he supposed—somewhat questionable ; and Downie knew right well that their uncle might forgive a *liaison*, but never a marriage with one of an inferior grade. The conduct and bearing of the lady at the villa seemed unimpeachable ; so Downie had long felt doubtful how to act, and only indulged in vague hints to his brother's prejudice.

The pride and anger even these had kindled in the heart of the old lord, who was now gone, and the threats in which he had indulged, afforded Richard Trevelyan a fair specimen of what would assuredly be the result were his marriage ever known at Rhoscadzhel ; and when pressed on the subject pretty pointedly, he had assured his uncle—while his cheek flushed and his heart burned with shame—that he was still unwedded and free ; and even as he made the false avowal, the soft pleading eyes of Constance, his own true wife, and the voices of their children, came vividly and upbraidingly to memory !

Now the foolish old man had passed away, the barrier was removed, and all should be made light that had hitherto been darkness, as her husband's hastily written letter informed her.

Yet she thought, with honest indignation, how hard it was that she had been for all these eighteen years and more kept out of her proper sphere as the wedded wife of Richard Trevelyan, often taking almost flight from *this* town and *that* hotel, lest he should be recognised ; consigned hence to a life of secrecy and seclusion ; a life that might yet cast doubts upon the very name and birth of her children, through the whim, the old-fashioned pride and folly of an absurd and antiquated peer, whose ideas went back, even far beyond the days of his youth, when people travelled in stage-coaches, used sand and sealing-wax for letters ; when steam and telegraphy were unknown, when papers were published weekly at sixpence ; and was one who deemed that railways, electricity, penny-dailies, and what is generally known as progress, are sending all the world to ruin.

Her husband's letter filled her with joy. He playfully added, "I fear I have drunk of the well of St. Keyne before you," alluding to the well-known spring near Liskeard, a draught from which the Cornish folks suppose will ensure ascendancy in domestic affairs, and the letter was signed for the first time "Your loving husband, LAMORNA."

How strange to her eye the new signature looked. She felt somehow that she preferred his old one of "Richard." But they were one and the same now, and a little time should see her in her place, as mistress of that stately dwelling, Rhoscadzhel, which she had only seen once from a distance, and felt then,

with an emotion of unmerited humiliation, that she could not, and dared not, enter.

Like all its predecessors, this letter, that contained so much in a few lines, was addressed to her as "Mrs. Devereaux," and she felt a momentary pang, but remembered that to have addressed her by the title, which was now so justly hers, might have sorely perplexed the rural postman of her neighbourhood.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY LAMORNA.

IT was a difficult task for Constance Devereaux to conceal her undeniable joy from her affectionate and observant son and daughter; and her heart would sometimes upbraid her that she should feel thus happy on an occasion which must cause them all to wear mourning, the external livery of at least conventional woe.

Denzil and his sister attributed her alternate fits of radiance and silence to pleasure at the anticipated return of their father, who on this occasion had necessarily been longer absent than usual from the Villa at Porthellick.

The equivocation and anxiety of years—years the happiness of which had in it so much of alloy—were about to be removed now. She was at last Constance Lady Lamorna of Rhoscadzhel—the wife of him who represented one of the oldest, and perhaps, most noble families in the duchy; but one passage in her husband's letter troubled and perplexed her, though it caused neither fear nor doubt—of one kind at least—in her loving and trusting heart.

"Our marriage must still be kept a secret for *a little time*; when we meet, I shall tell you *why*."

After so much had been endured, and now when the barrier had been swept away by death, why should there be more secrecy still—at a time so critical for their Denzil, too?

For a week she tortured herself with endless surmises which might have grown into actual fears but for the arrival of her husband, looking so well and so handsome, and though grave (for he had loved his generous old uncle—his second father, as he termed him), so evidently pleased and happy; and Constance thought it fortunate that their son and daughter were both absent, she had so much to say and to hear.

Denzil had taken his rod and gone forth to fish in some lonely tarn amid the moors, while Sybil had driven away in the pony phaeton to visit some friend at a distance,

"Here's his lord—the master himself, ma'am!" said Derrick Braddon, who was the only human being in England that shared their mystery, and who was now "dying," as the phrase is, for permission to share with others the great secret the faithful fellow had kept so long and so well; and now Dick's weather-beaten visage was radiant with pride and pleasure as he ushered Richard into the pretty little drawing-room, when, with a girlish bound, Constance sprang into his open arms.

"Well, dearest Materfamilias," said he, kissing her tenderly on the proffered lips and radiant eyes; "you are looking as young and as charming as ever—ay, even as on that eventful morning in St. Mary's, at Montreal, a morning we may remember now without fear, my own one!"

"So the poor old man is gone at last, and our days of disimulation are over," she replied, sobbing amid the smiles that beamed on her upturned face.

"And you have acted wisely in not adopting deep mourning yet."

"Why—wisely?" she asked, while perceiving that her husband must have doffed his black costume somewhere on the way to Porthellick, for he was as usual attired in a shooting-suit and brown leather gaiters; and she felt an unpleasant emotion by this circumstance, for whence this continued caution, she thought; this care, this hateful continuation of an *alias*, as it seemed, this playing of a double character, if all were right and clear? and now the passage in his letter flashed upon her memory.

"I said 'wisely,' dearest Constance; because we have still a part to play."

"Still?" she queried, mournfully, and her eyelids drooped.

"Tell me—the children know nothing of this change in our fortunes, I hope?"

"No—and dear Denzil, you are aware, has been—gazetted."

"To my old corps—so I saw; God bless the boy?" exclaimed Richard Trevelyan; "yes, but what I mean is, that I must bring you all before the world—you as the wife, and them as the children, of Lord Lamorna, with judicious care and a strength of *conviction* that none can doubt or challenge."

"Oh, Richard," said she, trembling, "I do not understand you."

"Here, I am still known as Captain Devereaux; but the world, which deems me a bachelor, must be convinced that we were married to each other *in facie ecclesiae*, as those lawyer-fellows have it; and the proofs of that circumstance must be forthcoming."

"Proofs?" she repeated, faintly, as she seated herself, and

grew very, very pale, for it seemed to her over-sensitive mind as if his manner had become hard and sententious, even while he stooped over, and tenderly and caressingly held in his, her little hand whereon was the wedding ring that Père Latour had consecrated ; and now there ensued a brief pause, for in his knowledge of her extreme sensibility, and the amount of his own loving nature, he feared the explanation of all he meant might wound.

Though some might have deemed the secrecy to which he had condemned her for years (lest they might lose the large fortune now theirs) selfish ; Richard Trevelyan had ever been nervously jealous of her honour, and the honour of their innocent children ; and at times, he had accused himself of moral cowardice in his submission to the caprice of his uncle. In his heart he had always cursed the duplicity to which they had been compelled to resort, and the false position in which that duplicity had placed them all for such a length of time. All this was to be atoned for now ; but he felt that it must be done wisely, warily and surely, or as he had said, with *strength*, lest the world in which he had hitherto moved as a bachelor—that selfish and suspicious bugbear called “Society” might shrug its shoulders, and ask, “Can all this story be true ?”

He had some difficulty in explaining all this to Constance, but, fortunately, what he lacked in tact, he made up for in tenderness ; yet, after a minute of silence and tears, she exclaimed with uncontrollable bitterness,

“ I alone am to blame ! I ought to have foreseen the difficulties with which I should encumber you ; but I was a simple, a trusting, and a heedless girl ! — ”

“ Nor has the trust of your girlhood been misplaced, Constance,” he urged.

“ What Eden is without its serpent—what house without its skeleton ? and I am yours ! ”

“ My darling Constance, do not speak thus, and do not weep ; think if Denzil or Sybil were to return and see you thus agitated—see what they never saw before, tears in your eyes ; at least, tears so bitter as these,” urged her husband, as he caressed her tenderly. You know, my own love, that solid proofs of our marriage, beyond mere assertion, *must* be forthcoming ; and until these proofs are in our hands, we must appear to the world as Captain and Mrs. Devereaux ; we must act wisely and warily, I repeat, for the sake of our dear children.”

The face of Constance became ghastly, and a dangerous gleam, such as Richard had never seen before, was in her dark eyes, while she said, huskily,

“ Honest Derrick Braddon witnessed our marriage, Richard.”

"True; but I am now a peer of the realm, and I wish the full proof of it all. You know that during the past year I have thrice written to the Père Latour for the certificate of our marriage, but wrote in vain, he has left my letters unanswered. I might employ those lawyers, Gorbelly and Culverhole, to sift the matter, but to use their aid might set abroad a scandal at once; hence I now propose to start by the first steamer for America to get the necessary documents in person, and Derrick Braddon shall accompany me."

"And may not I?" she pleaded, softly.

"No, darling Constance, I shall be gone for more than a month—for two, perhaps, and you have to get Denzil fitted out for his regiment—my poor Denzil, I shall grudge those two months' loss of his society fearfully, as you may suppose."

"Pardon my momentary bitterness, dearest Richard, but after so much endurance, after such long concealment—" her voice failed her, and wreathing her soft arms round his neck, she nestled her little head on his breast, and whispered with a sigh, as if her heart would burst, "is it irrevocable—and must I, too, be separated from my boy?"

"It is but for a time, Conny—no young fellow should be idle; and a year or so in the army—"

"And he will return, Richard—"

"As the son and heir of Lord Lamorna!"

"But oh, how I shall miss him!"

"You will have Sybil and me!"

"But you, too, I am about to lose."

"For a time only; and do not speak so forebodingly, dear Constance."

"I felt such disappointment that Denzil should appear at Sandhurst, and even in the Gazette, not as a Trevelyan, but as a Devereaux!"

"And a Devereaux he deems himself, and must continue to do so, till I return from Montreal. Old Trecarrel is going in command to India, and when matters are all squared here, I'll get Denzil on his Staff with ease. We have been the victims of circumstances; have I not a thousand times said, that if my uncle had discovered our marriage, we should have lost all? He is gone at last; but you know, Conny darling, that his ideas were simply absurd—in some respects suited only to the middle ages—the middle ages do I say? By Jove, to those when the Anglo-Saxons wore coats of paint, and dyed their yellow hair blue. But are things arranged in this world wisely, think you, Constance?"

"I dare not impugn the plans of a beneficent Providence."

"But Providence never meant the conditions of life to turn out as they too often do."

"How, Richard," she asked, gently; "I don't quite understand you?"

"That the greatest number of the rich, the powerful and the most successful—by flukes, perhaps—are fools or knaves."

"Ah, but if riches brought talent—the wealthy and powerful would be too happy, and Fate or Providence do not make them so."

"I cannot express to you how my heart was wrung with jealous envy, and even with shame, when I saw Downie's family stand around my uncle's grave, and enjoying all the freedom and hospitality of Rhoscadzhel—even his cold-blooded, fashionable wife, too—and thought how my own three tender loves were debarred—"

"And unknown—"

"Yes——d—n it, unknown, and must be for a few weeks still, but time cures all evils, and it will cure this. Yet is not the gazetting of the two cousins, Denzil and the oldest of Downie's four boys, in one paragraph, and to my old corps, too a remarkable coincidence—all the more so, that they are ignorant of each other's existence!"

"My poor Denzil—he is so bright and clever!"

"Ay, more clever than ever I was. In my time, when I met you so happily in pleasant Montreal, one could be a fair average soldier without all the polyglot accomplishments so necessary now, when he who quits Sandhurst as a candidate for a commission direct, with five shillings and threepence per diem to further his extravagance, might quite as well come out for the Church or Bar, with the chance of a safer and better paid berth in either."

"And he joins his regiment as a Devereaux—my poor boy!"

"Still harping on that string!" said Richard, a little impatiently. "On my return when matters are all sorted and made clear by the legal documents, Denzil and Sybil must be simply told, that my succession to estates and a title have necessitated a change of name."

"But our Denzil is no longer a boy—and I shall almost blush for my past duplicity, before my own girl!"

"Come, come, Conny, this is foolish; what is done cannot be undone, and it is useless to cry over spilt milk."

"And how to explain this absence, for perhaps two months, you say, when they have been longing every hour for your return from London, where they believed you to be?"

"I know not yet, Constance; but a little time will make all

things clear. We had no marriage contract—a love-sick subaltern and a schoolgirl were not likely to think of such a thing—we had only the brief certificate deposited with Père Latour; but a will executed by me, in favour of you and the children shall make all right and secure; and now my little wife, for a biscuit and glass of dry sherry, as I have ridden this morning all the way from beyond Launceston."

Constance retired for a minute to bathe her eyes, to smooth her hair, and came back to look composed and smiling; for she had still to act a part.

The hour for which she had so pined and yearned—especially since her son Denzil first saw the light in a lonely village among the Apennines—the time when she should take her place as the wife of Richard Trevelyan, (not that she cared for the wealth that place might bring her) had come; and yet there were fresh delays to be endured by her, and now it might be dangers dared by him she loved so well; but he strove in his honest, manly, and affectionate way to cheer her; and as he filled his glass with the sparkling golden sherry, he kissed her once more as if they were lovers still and said merrily,

"I drink to your speedy welcome home, my dear little Lady Lamorna!"



CHAPTER VIII.

THE BROKEN CIRCLE.

SYBIL who was clever with her pencil, made up quite a collection of sketches from her portfolio, a pleasant labour of love, for Denzil to take with him, as a souvenir of herself and their beloved Cornwall, and skilfully the girl's able hand and artistic eye had reproduced the wondrous stone avenues of Dartmoor and Merivale, the Stone Pillar of St. Colomb, the Cliff Castles of Trebyn, Tintagel and elsewhere, with many a pretty and peaceful cottage scene.

Preparations for her husband's journey, and more than all, the Indian outfit of Denzil, luckily occupied the attention of Constance for a time; thus her hands and those of Sybil were fully employed, and the minds of both had no leisure to brood over the coming separation.

Weary of the monotony of life at the villa, great was the delight of old weather-beaten Dick Braddon, to "be off" as he said, "to see the world once more with the master," whom he loved only second perhaps to Denzil, whose free frank bearing charmed the

veteran, who averred that he was exactly like what his father was, when he joined the Cornish Light Infantry, a cherry-cheeked ensign, long ago in America.

But the hour of separation drew near, when both father and son were to leave Porthellick, and depart each upon their long watery journey ;—the former to America, and the latter to what seemed the other end of the world—India ; and the heart of Constance began to sink in spite of herself.

“ Oh, Richard,” she whispered once, with her soft face nestling in her husband’s neck, while his protecting arm went kindly round her ; “ the greatest joy on earth is to possess a child—the greatest woe to lose it ! The loss of our parents we may, and must, in the course of time anticipate ; but the loss of our children—never ! ”

“ But Denzil will return, Conny—you would not have the boy tied to your apron-strings, like Sybil ? ” urged Richard, laughing to cheer and rouse her ; but, nevertheless, the rank, title and fair fortune now before them all, the mother’s anxious heart foreboded sorrow in the future ; and now came the last night her boy was to sleep under his father’s roof, ere he was to go forth into the world—forth like a branch torn from its parent stem.

When all were in slumber that night, poor Constance stole in to watch her Denzil as he slept. The feeble rays of the night-lamp played on the features of her boy, and on the glitter of a laced scarlet-coat and gold epaulettes that hung on the pier glass. With the vanity natural to youth, he had been contemplating himself in his regimental finery ere he went to repose, and his bullock-trunk and overland, lettered for “ India,” were among the first things that caught her eye, bringing more home to her heart the fact of his departure.

He was still hers !

To-morrow he should be far away from her, out on the great and stirring highway of life—her petted boy no longer ; and smiles, like ripples upon shining water, seemed to spread over the smooth face of the sleeping lad, even as the tears gathered in the eyes, and prayer in the heart of the mother who watched him for a time, with her hands clasped, and stole away with many a backward glance, thinking how lonely she should be when that hour on the morrow came.

And this tall and handsome lad—this young soldier going forth to carry the Queen’s colours in the distant East, was once her “ baby boy,” the child she had borne, nursed and nurtured. She had a sweet and sad, yet proud and joyous consciousness in this. Had he been weakly, deformed or crippled, she should have loved him all the same ; but then, thank God ! her Denzil was so handsome.

Often in far-away lands, on weary marches, in comfortless tents and rickety bungalows, on the banks of the Sutlej, or amid hostile Sikhs and Afghans, would he dream of the soft and loving face that had been bent in silence over his—the face he never more might see, save in those kind visions that God sends in sleep, to soothe—it may be, to sadden and to warn us.

"No child can ever know how dearly its parents love it—how they suffer in its illness, loss or departure," whispered Constance to herself; "still," she thought upbraidingly, "I left my poor father to sorrow in his humble home at Montreal—but then it was with a husband, so dear and true!"

The child that is ill or absent is always valued the most; so poor Sybil was almost forgotten by her mother for the time. A few hours more, and both husband and son had left her in tears, to separate in London, each to pursue his own journey.

Of Richard's ultimate intentions Denzil and Sybil were to be left in ignorance, and also of the object and purport of his absence. So Constance was left with her daughter only by her side.

The poor mother's heart felt as if thrust back upon herself now, for she was the mistress of a great family secret, which, as yet, she could not share even with Sybil.

So the long dreaded "to-morrow" had come, and other mornings followed, and Constance began to feel herself most sadly alone. Often she stole into the well-known room to kiss the pillow on which her Denzil's cheek had rested; to weep over the bed as if a death had been there, and not the departure of a gallant boy full of hope and life; and on each occasion, as she lingered there, she strove to pourtray in fancy his face, as she last saw him, sleeping all unconscious that she hovered near; and with a wild but loving presentiment and hope that he would again occupy it some day, she kept his room intact, exactly as he had left it; his books, his fencing foils on those particular shelves, his old hat stuck round with fishing-flies, on that particular peg where he was wont to hang it; his rods and guns in yonder corner; though every detail, such as these, reminded her of him more vividly, fed her grief, and roused the intense longing for his presence and return to her arms again.

"India—India?" she would say, half aloud, when communing with herself; "it may be ten years of separation. Ten years! Oh—no, never, surely! With my Richard's great influence as a peer of the realm, that must never be permitted. In ten years what changes must inevitably happen; who may be alive then, and who dead? Sybil should then be seven-and-twenty—married, perhaps—and to whom? with children it may be—my poor innocent Sybil! Oh, no; three years at the utmost, and Denzil shall be again by his mamma's side!"

So the lonely Constance pondered, hoped and lovingly spun out like a web, her desires or mental view of the future, striving to gather happiness therefrom ; while Sybil sought in vain to cheer her with music, to lure her out for a walk in the willowed dell, or a drive along the coast road, in their pretty pony phaeton.

The month was October now. With a sullen wail the autumnal blasts swept from the wooded hollows of Moorwinstow to the cavernous headland of Tintagel, cresting before their breath the waves of the Bristol Channel. There came gusts of rain too, that beat dolefully on the window-panes, with an angry and impatient patter, adding to the dreariness of heart experienced by those in the Villa of Porthellick. The season was bleak, and nowhere could it seem more so than among the barren moors, the sea-beat bluffs, and resounding caverns, the wind swept pasture-lands and promontories of Cornwall.

The woods were almost bare ; the few remaining leaves fluttered brown and crisp on the bared twigs ; the stackyards were full, and the produce of the potato-fields was consigned to long brown pits of fresh earth and straw for the coming winter ; the uplands were covered with decaying stubble, or being ploughed, while, gorged with worms, the great crows sat sleepily in the shining furrows. Thick as gnats in summer, the dingy-coloured sparrows twittered in the hedgerows, which were being lopped and trimmed ; and the axes of the woodmen were heard in thicket and copse ; while the smoke of the steam-engine that worked and drained the adjacent copper-mine hung low in the frowsy air, adding at times to the gloom of the landscape.

Richard Trevelyan had sailed, and Denzil too ; and Constance was aware that each of them had to traverse a wintry sea, the former before he returned and the latter before he reached his destination.

The public prints had duly announced that "the Right Hon. Lord Lamorna and suite (*i.e.*, old Derrick Braddon) had gone for a tour in America ;" and Denzil, if his eyes ever saw the announcement—which is doubtful—could little have dreamed how nearly it concerned him, and the mother on whom he doted, and whom he still knew only as "Mrs. Devereaux."

The latter had to make many an excuse, even to Sybil, to account for her husband's protracted absence from the villa ; and Downie Trevelyan, when he read the above announcement in the *Morning Post*, wiped his gold eye-glass and read it again with much perplexity and secret annoyance, while surmising "what the deuce could take Richard so suddenly to America at this season of the year !"

The new task and anxiety of watching the shipping intelligence next occupied the attention of Constance. The steamer in which

Richard sailed had been seen, signalled, and spoken with in sundry Atlantic latitudes and longitudes, and some seventeen days or so saw her safely at the end of her voyage; but the transport, a great Indiaman, with Denzil on board, was seldom heard of, some at long dates; and at longer dates, too, came his hastily-written letters from St. Helena, and from Ascension, or by homeward-bound ships; few men, even of the most wealthy, thought then of proceeding to India by the scarcely developed overland route; and how fondly those letters were read over and over again—the last thing at night, and the first in the morning—the mother, situated as Constance was then, may imagine; for the loving little family circle was broken now.



CHAPTER IX.

FOREBODINGS.

IF ever Constance left the villa, she sought the direction of the coast, and, when there, never wearied of watching the wide expanse of the Bristol Channel, with its passing ships and steamers; for the changing ocean was the path by which her loved ones were to return to her—Richard within a month, perhaps, now; but their son Denzil—oh, years must elapse, her heart foreboded and knew, ere she should see him again.

And now, as the season advanced, and storms and wrecks among the Scilly Isles and about the Land's End were not unfrequent, her soul became a prey to nervous fears, that were fed and fostered, in spite of herself, by Derrick's sister, Winny Braddon, a superstitious old Cornish woman, who had been Sybil's nurse.

Winny, a devout believer in dreams, visions, the virtues of miraculous wells and so forth, was wont to declare that, when all specifics failed, she had been cured of rheumatism by crawling through the famous Men-an-tol, or Holed Stone, near Lanyon; and now she shook her grey head ominously when the wind blew a gale and rolled a heavy surf upon the shore, and averred that she could hear the wreck-bells booming under the sea at Boscastle. So Constance, though naturally free from all idle fancies save that which we may term the affectionate superstition of the heart, could not listen to the croaking of this old woman without vague and growing fear; for, though Winny knew nothing of the interest that "Mrs. Devereaux" had in the family of Lamorna, or her connection therewith (Derrick having kept his secret well), those sounds amid the deep at Boscastle were supposed by Cornish tradition to bode evil to the line of Trevelyan.

For it would appear, as Winny Braddon related, that long ago the villagers of Boscastle were very envious of the melodious and musical bells that were rung in the church of Tintagel, to which they were a gift from its superior, the Abbot of Fontevrault, in Normandy. So De Bottreaux, who was lord of the manor, and the site of whose castle is now marked by a green mound only, to gratify those villagers who were his vassals, ordered from London a merry peal for the spire of Boscastle Church ; and those bells were duly shipped on board a vessel named the *Koithgath* caravel, for her captain, Launcelot Trevelyan, was a younger son of the family of Lamorna. He had been a wild fellow, of whose future career evil had been predicted by a *Pydrak Brâz* (old Cornish for a great-witch) who dwelt in the Zawn Reeth, a granite cavern at Nans Isal, on the western side of the bay so named—a wild and savage place, surrounded by masses of scattered rock.

So Master Launcelot ran off to sea, and served under Drake and Hawkins in many a dark and desperate day's work among the Spaniards in Brazil, Madeira, and the Cape de Verde ; and had once been round the Cape of Storms as far as the realms of that mysterious personage then known as Prester John.

Thus in due time, steered by Paul Poindester, a famous pilot from the Scilly Isles, the *Koithgath*, with the bells on board, arrived in the offing and in sight of Boscastle, with all its furzy hollows, above which rose the castle of Bottreaux, with the standard of its owner flying—a great banner, bearing three toads and a griffin.

As the ship drew in shore, the bells of Tintagel Church, that towers still on a bleak, exposed, and lofty cliff to the westward of King Arthur's Castle, rang out a taunting and a joyous peal that mingled with the booming of the ocean as it rolled on the bluffs below, or far up the sandy bay of Trebarreth Strand.

Then, according to the story, Launcelot Trevelyan swore an exulting oath as he surveyed the stupendous scenery of his native shore, adding—

“ I am here again—thank my good ship and her canvas ! ”

“ Nay,” said the old pilot Poindester, as he reverently lifted his hat, “ rather thank God and St. Michael of Cornwall.”

“ By Heaven,” rejoined Trevelyan, “ I thank myself and the fair wind only.”

Poindester, though fearless, for he was a native of those dangerous isles where, for one who dies a natural death, nine are drowned, rebuked this irreverence, on which the wild Trevelyan stormed and blasphemed ; and, forgetting to heed his compass or steerage, permitted his caravel to be dashed ashore, just as a sudden storm came on, and the waves of the Bristol Channel

hurled her on the cliffs of the Black Pit, where every soul on board perished, save old Paul Poindester. From the high gilded poop of his caravel, Launcelot Trevelyan, with a fierce malediction, cast into the sea, before it swallowed him up, the silver whistle and chain—his badge of naval authority, the gift of Sir Francis Drake—lest it should become some wrecker's prey; and as the timbers parted, and the ship went down into the angry sea, the clangour of the bells resounded in her hold; and there to this day they are heard by people loitering on the shore, when storms are nigh—or when aught is about to happen to the family of Lamorna, add the superstitious folks of Cornwall.

"Oh, why did this absurd old woman relate such a boding story to me?" thought Constance, for, situated as she was, she had become somewhat of a prey to gloomy and grotesque fancies; hence, often in the night she would dream of wrecks, and seem to hear the sound of alarm-bells in her ear, and, starting from bed, would draw up the window-blind and look forth to see if a storm was raving without, forgetting then, even though it were so, all might be calm and peaceful elsewhere.

Then, when she saw the autumnal moon in all its unclouded glory flooding her chamber and her white night-dress with silver lustre; that all was calm and still, the diamond-like stars sparkling above the dark willows in the glen, or the darker woodland in the distance; and that no noises came to her listening ear, but perhaps the bark of a house-dog, or such as may be aptly termed the sounds of night and silence, she would go back to her lonely pillow with a prayer on her lips for those who were absent, and for all who were on the sea.

A letter from Richard made her supremely happy!

He had reached Montreal in safety. The poor old curé of the secluded little chapel of St. Mary—the good Père Latour—was dead, and had been so for some time; hence the reason that her husband's letters had remained unanswered. Even the little acolyte, the other witness of their marriage, had gone to his last home; and now, in memory, Constance could recal the thin, spare figure of the old clergyman, with his white hair brushed behind his ears, his peculiar shovel hat, long black soutane, cape, and gaiters to the knee—for he had been a man of the old school of French colonial priests.

"His little chapel and vestry, both built of wood, as you will remember, Conny, were burned down three years after our regiment left the city," continued Richard's letter; "and all the Records there perished in the flames; among other things, the volume of the Register in which our marriage was entered. But, most providentially, the successor of Latour in the poor incumbency, found among some of his papers, the signed copy—or rather I

should say, the original of our marriage lines or certificate—which we had never received. *It is now in my possession*, and I have folded it inside a will which I prepared on the voyage out—a will dearest Conny, in which, to make all certain for the future—as there are those at home, whom I doubt—I leave all I have in the world to you for life, and to Denzil and Sybil after you, absolutely. Your poor father and mother are interred not far from the grave of Père Latour, and I have ordered white marble crosses to be erected to the memory of the three. I shall sail for England a fortnight hence, in the steamer *Admiral*, and till then, shall renew in sweet fancy the days of our loverhood, by many a ramble about Montreal; by Hochlega, the picturesque site of the old Indian village, now its eastern suburb; the nine aisles of the great Cathedral; the gardens of the Convent of Notre Dame, and among the mountains close by—in many a shady walk and lane; and Heaven and myself alone can know how I miss you and our dearest Sybil, and how I am longing to return." It was signed "*Lamorna*."

"My dear, dear Richard!" sobbed the wife, while her tears of joy fell fast.

"All the places I mention, you must remember well," he added in a postscript; "and you may imagine how sad it is for me to wander alone where once we were so happy together."

"He was to sail in a fortnight from the date of his letter," thought Constance, with a glow of pleasure in her heart; "he must now be on the sea! and in a fortnight from this, I shall see him again—my dear, dear husband—so kind, so good, so true and thoughtful, even to mark, unasked by me, the last resting-place of poor mamma and papa—and even of the good Père Latour. The latter act, is in itself, a compliment to me."

Then an emotion of terror seized her, as she perused the letter again.

What if the attested copy of those important "lines," their certificate of marriage, *had perished* in the same fire which consumed the wooden chapel, the vestry, and its registers! What then would have been her fate, and more than all, by sequence, the fate and position of the children she idolised—her proud boy Denzil, and the beautiful Sybil, now budding on the verge of womanhood?

A stigma—a stain—she could never remove, might have been on them, to the end of their lives; and her soul seemed to die within her as she thought of the peril—the narrow escape, they had all made!

She thanked Heaven with fervour in her heart, and again and again, it swelled with gratitude to her husband, and with love for him and confidence in him; with joy, too, that he would so

soon hear all this from her own loving lips—for in a few days now, the *Admiral* would be due in the Thames !



CHAPTER X.

THE LONELY TARN.

WHILE Constance Trevelyan—or Lady Lamorna, for so we ought to name her, though still known only as Mrs. Devereaux—was counting the hours of her husband's absence, and looking forward fondly to his return, Sybil, unnoticed, was absent from home more often and for longer periods than had been her wont; and the mother, preoccupied by her own secret thoughts, and anxiety for those who were far distant, failed to remark the circumstance till it was incidentally mentioned by Winny Braddon.

When questioned, Constance remarked with concern, that Sybil blushed deeply, and hastened to show her sketch-book, now nearly full, as an evidence of her artistic industry, and the progress she had made ; she did not add with whom, or that she had a lover. She who never before had a secret from her mamma, was beginning to have one now ; and had the latter looked more closely at the sketch-book, she might have found traces and touches of a bolder and more masterly pencil than Sybil's ; and it all came to pass thus.

A mile or two from the Villa of Porthellick, there lies a lake, which had been a favourite resort of her brother Denzil when fishing for pike ; and of this place, and a great old Druidical stone that stands thereby, Sybil wished to make a sketch, and on a suitable day proceeded thither with all her apparatus, as she was anxious to have her production finished before her papa's return.

It was a lonely tarn, deep and dark, yet there the bright green leaves and snowy flowers of the water lilies floated, and the voracious pike which rose at times to snap a fly or so, went plunging to the oozy bottom at the sight of aught so unusual as a human being invading the solitude.

There were within its circuit, three tiny willow-tufted isles, where the water-ducks built their nests amid the osiers, and near which an occasional wild swan flapped defiance with its wings among the floating lilies that impeded its stately progress.

On the hill slopes the varied tints of autumn were in all their beauty ; the ripened apples and pears were dropping among the long grass of many an orchard ; green yet lingered amid the foliage of the old Cornish elms ; but the beeches were almost

blood red, and the oaks were crisped and brown. In the calm depth of the tarn was reflected the shadow of the giant stone pillar, around which the storms, the winds and rain of perhaps three thousand years had swept ; yet there it stood, solid, silent, grim and monstrous. Could that stone have spoken, what a tale it might have told of savage rites and human sacrifice ; what a history unfolded of races long since passed away or merged in others—the men of days before even the galleys of the Phœnicians cast anchor in Bude Bay, when their crews came to barter for tin with the wild aborigines of Cornwall.

Sybil, seated on a little camp-stool, was so intent upon her work, that some time elapsed before she perceived that another artist—whether professional or, like herself an amateur, she could not determine—was similarly occupied not far from her ; and insensibly her eye wandered, from time to time, in the direction of this stranger.

He was decidedly a handsome young man, whose grey tweed suit and round hat of grey felt, encircled by a narrow crape band, failed to conceal a very distinguished air. His features were good and well bronzed by a foreign sun, apparently. He was without whiskers, or was closely shaven ; but a smart moustache and dark eyebrows gave character to his face. He was seated on a fragment of rock, and in intervals between the progress of his work and the whiffs of a cigar, spoke caressingly to a large dog that lay near him on the grass.

The latter, a magnificent Thibet mastiff, with heavy jowl and pendant flap-like ears, suddenly rose and came slowly, leisurely and steadily forward to Sybil, and after a glance of survey, eyed her with what was almost a smile—if a *dog* can be said to smile. He then sniffed her skirts, and pawed them with his enormous paw. Sybil evinced no fear ; she patted the dog's huge rough head ; but was somewhat surprised, when he lay down on her skirts with the utmost composure, and showed no disposition to release her.

The young man, whose eyes had followed, with some interest, the motions of his dog, now whistled to him ; but the mastiff did not stir.

"Rajah—Rajah—you impudent rascal, come here!" he cried.

But Rajah made no other response, than by whipping the turf with his long tail.

Upon this his master came round the margin of the tarn, and approaching Sybil, threw aside his cigar, lifted his hat and apologized, adding,—

"I trust that my dog has not alarmed you?"

"O no—not in the least," replied Sybil, who began to feel somewhat embarrassed now.

"I assure you that he is very gentle; but he is permitting him to be too free, and very few young ladies would, like you, have seen such an animal approach them without betraying signs of alarm, and all that sort of thing. Get up sir!"

"Oh, please don't," said Sybil holding out an ungloved and very pretty hand, deprecatingly, between the dog and the young man's uplifted cane; "all dogs, and even cats, like me."

"Thereby acknowledging your power—eh?" responded the stranger, looking down admiringly into the soft, bright, earnest face, and clear dark eyes that were turned upward to his own.

"I don't know what you mean by my power," said Sybil, with simplicity; but, as most people like me, why should not dogs—and—and this is such a splendid fellow!"

"I have brought him from a very distant country—he was the farewell gift of a friend who died, otherwise," he added, gallantly, "I should beg your acceptance of him."

Sybil now coloured more deeply, and became uneasy; but the stranger resumed in his most suave tone,—

"And you have been sketching this pretty little lake—like me? Our tastes and occupation are quite similar!"

Sybil had closed her book of sketches.

"Will you not do me the favour to ——"

"Show you my poor production—do you mean, sir?"

"Yes."

"But you may be an artist, and a well-skilled one."

"And what then?"

"I should blush for my work."

"Nay. Well, then, I am *not* an artist, but merely an amateur—an officer on leave; yet I am fond of using my pencil, and have the regimental reputation of doing so with pretty good success."

Sybil thought of her brother Denzil—he too was an officer; poor Denzil, now so far, far away—and she gave her new acquaintance a half shy and half doubtful glance, that served to charm him very much, and then showed her sketch, which he praised warmly, as by good breeding and in duty bound.

It was doubtless cleverly done, but his eye wandered to the rare and delicate beauty of the little hand that had achieved it. Her sketch, however, was inferior to his own, which he now produced, with Sybil's own figure seated on the camp-stool introduced in the middle distance, so as to give the exact proportion of the great rock-pillar.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "you have *me* in your sketch, as well as the big stone."

"Could I omit the most pleasing feature in my little landscape?"

Sybil coloured again, for her education, and the peculiar mode

in which she had been reared, made her at times, shy and reserved ; she knew not why, for to be so was not her natural character, which was rather candid, frank, and free ; so, to change the subject from herself, she hastened to turn over the leaves of the stranger's sketch-book, wherein were many drawings full of spirit and interest.

"That wooden cross," said he, "marks the grave of poor Jack Delamere, who gave me Rajah, through whom I have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance to-day. He died when we were on the march up country to Allahabad, and I buried him in a grove of date palms."

"And he lies there alone?" said Sybil, her eyes involuntarily wandering to the great dog which lay near them on the grass.

"Quite alone—poor Jack ! he was the soul of the mess-bungalow."

"And what is this Hall with the wonderful pillars?"

"Oh ! that is a Buddhist Temple—all hewn out of the living rock. I sketched it at Ellora. Those caves are masses of carving, and are among the most wonderful things in India, as they often consist of many apartments or halls of vast height, decorated, as you see, with elaborate columns and monstrous statues. My next sketch is a Hindoo water-girl. I gave her a rupee to stand for me at Arcot ; but, as her clothing is somewhat scanty, we shall skip to the next. Ah—that is a mango tree, and here are the palace of Mysore and the town and fort of Agra."

"How much you have seen of the world!" said Sybil, her dark eyes dilating as she glanced for a moment at the stranger's young and handsome face ; "I wonder if Denzil will ever look upon those places. Heavens, how poor and mean do my Cornish sketches of ruins, rocks, and engines look, after yours!"

"Nay, do not say so," replied the other, smiling, as he surveyed with growing interest the soft bright face of the speaker, under its piquant little hat and veil ; "hideous as the edifices are in reality, some of our mining engine-houses, with all their chains and pulleys, wheels and timber, blocks and gearing, their heaps of rubbish and *débris*, they make somewhat picturesque sketches."

"True ; but I prefer those great solemn stones of unknown antiquity, and I never tire of drawing them."

"But they are so deucedly alike," replied the young officer ; "and now for *your* book—ah, do permit me," he added, turning the leaves.

"That is the Lake of Como, where we passed several months," said Sybil, tremulous with hesitation, for what she deemed alike the boldness of the attempt and the poverty of her execution. "I now wonder how I dared to think of depicting such a scene, with all its white villas and green groves of orange and flowering

arbutas ; its cliffs and crags, and, over all, the snow-clad peaks of the Alps, and the mountains of the Brianza covered with pine-forests !”

“ Perhaps each sketch has the souvenir of some past or tender happiness ? And this stately palace, with the terrace before it ?”

“ Is one where papa and mamma resided when I was very young ?”

“ You are not very old yet,” was the laughing rejoinder.”

“ It is on the Arno. But how often have I wished for power to depict the lovely Lake of Como, as we could see it by night from the windows of our villa—the shore all dark, or dotted only by the lights in many a palace and dwelling, the snowy summits of the Splügen Alps rising against the starlit sky, and the oars of the gondoliers flashing as their little vessels shot across the sheet of silent water.”

“ You are quite an enthusiast !” said the officer, smiling ; and at that moment, with her sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, the usually pale girl looked radiantly beautiful ; but her dark eyes drooped, and she replied—

“ I did so love Como and our pleasant picnics to Bellagio and other places, where the orange-trees overhang the water so closely that the golden fruit dipped in it from time to time, when the laden branches were stirred by the passing wind.”

“ Now you will surely agree with me, that when contrasted with such scenery as you describe, our Cornish rock-pillars and mines are but stupid affairs ?”

“ Ah, no—I cannot assent to that ; there is Bottalick Mine, for example, where the gloomy precipices of slate are hewn into such fantastic shapes, and the great engine, perched on the ledge of a terrible cliff, enables the miner to work below the sea. Oh, think of that, to be quarrying for copper and tin in damp grottoes and cells four hundred and eighty feet below the ocean, and to hear its waves—the same waves that dash against Cape Cornwall—rolling the mighty boulders in thunder on the bluffs overhead !”

“ Have *you* been down and heard all that ?”

“ No, replied Sybil, blushing for her own energy and enthusiasm.

“ How then—”

“ Denzil has been down often.”

“ Denzil again,” said the stranger with a smile, and perhaps the faintest tone of pique ; “ you are surely very fond of this Denzil,”

“ Fond—I love him dearly !”

“ A candid admission.”

“ He is my only brother.”

"I am so glad to hear that he is a brother, and not—not—"

"What!"

"A cousin or—friend."

Sybil felt that the conversation was wandering from the picturesque, and now said, a little hastily,

"I must bid you good morning—my way lies there," she added, pointing westward.

"And mine also; so far, at least, as the high road—allow me to have the pleasure of carrying your camp-stool."

"Many thanks."

"Do you reside in this neighbourhood?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes—a little way from this," she replied, evasively.

"I am on a visit to an old Indian friend—General Trecarrel," said the stranger, in a tone and manner calculated to invite confidence; but Sybil instantly became reserved. Her absent parent, she knew not why, had ever most sedulously avoided the General and all his family, and her mamma had apparently acquiesced in this, for they knew that the General would at once, in the spurious "Captain Devereaux," recognise Richard Trevlyan. "You, perhaps, know the Trecarrels?" added her companion.

"I have not the pleasure—though I have heard of them, of course," replied Sybil, adjusting her veil tightly over her face, with an air of annoyance.

The gentleman said no more; but in silence carried her sketch-book and camp-stool until they reached the high road, where, aware that to remain longer with her might appear intrusive, he lifted his hat, and with studious politeness bade her adieu.

Sybil hastened homeward, nor dared to look back, though perfectly conscious that the eyes of the stranger, whose voice seemed to linger in her ear, would be looking after her more than once. She had all a young girl's perfect conviction of this.



CHAPTER XI.

CONCERNING FLIRTATION.

THE next noon proved a lovely autumnal one, and Sybil repaired once more to the tarn for the purpose of giving a few finishing touches to her sketch. She would have blushed with annoyance, and indignantly repudiated the idea that a chance of the stranger being there, perhaps, for the same purpose, led her to

go at precisely the same hour as on the preceding day. And yet, though a disappointment, it was somewhat of a relief to her, that neither he nor his great dog were in sight ; the floating swans and the huge rock-pillar alone met her eye in the solitude ; and seating herself she spread out her skirts, threw up her veil, and assumed her pencil ; but in the midst of her work her tiny white hand grew tremulous, every pulse quickened, and a thrill passed through her when she heard steps among the long rank grass ; the great nose of the Thibet mastiff was placed upon her knee, and she perceived her new friend again approaching, but on horseback.

He had not made even the pretence of coming to sketch as on the preceding morning ; he was without the materials for doing so, and hence must have come deliberately in search of her, for he dismounted.

“ I am indeed fortunate in meeting you here again,” said he, “ but I shall not intrude, as I fear I did yesterday ; I am merely rambling towards the sea-shore, to enjoy the breeze and a cigar till some friends join me.”

Sybil, who felt that she was painfully pale, bowed to her new acquaintance, who manifested no haste to prosecute his “ramble,” but seemed perfectly confident and disposed to be politely familiar. Still Sybil had no emotion of alarm at this ; she had never in her life been insulted, and felt that there was no real cause to repulse him, save that he was a visitor of the Trecarrels.

He, on the other hand, while gazing from time to time into her upturned face, was struck more by the calm, honest, and innocent expression of her radiant features than by their beauty, which was less that of form than of character, for though small and exquisitely feminine, her face, like that of her mother, was strongly marked, by the darkness of her eyes, their brows and long lashes. Her mouth certainly was beautifully formed, with a soft smile ever playing about it, for she was naturally of an arch and highly impressionable nature.

He did not permit the conversation to flag, but hovered near her, venturing to look over her shoulder from time to time, and giving little suggestions concerning her drawing, while in reality he was admiring the ladylike contour of her head, the delicacy of her slender neck, and the gloss of a single thick dark ringlet that strayed so captivatingly behind.

The first flush of emotion passed away in Sybil’s breast, and insensibly she found herself lured into an easy interchange of opinion on various subjects ; for in the topics of foreign travel, the galleries, habits, tastes, and amusements of other lands, they had ample matter for conversation, and found themselves

sliding into 'the position of friends, and talking of things and themes that seldom occupy the thoughts of a young girl.

Now, as each knew not the name of the other, and could not ask it, there was a decided awkwardness in this ; and as they continued to talk with animation, the huge Thibet mastiff, who had been their *introduceur*, rolled his great dark eyes from one to the other, and lashed the grass with his tail, as if quite satisfied with the result.

"After the colourless Indo-Britons and yellow Bengallees, how lovely seems the complexion of this fresh young English girl!" was the ever-recurring thought of the young officer, as he surveyed her critically, from her smart hat and feather to her foot that peeped from under her dress ; and a lovely little foot it was—tiny enough to have entered the famous slipper of Cinderella.

That the solitary girl was a lady was evident to him ; her carriage and bearing were full of graceful ease, and she had an attraction of manner and gesture peculiarly her own ; but *who* was she, that she, at her early years, had seen so much of the world, and could speak of Spain and Rome, of Athens and Sicily, and seemed to know every second village among the wilds of the Apennines and the Abruzzi ?

The sketching of this day was somewhat protracted, and Sybil became aware that their eyes sought each other with an interest she had never felt before in those of a stranger, and that each time they so met, her pulses quickened and her cheek flushed or grew pale. Whence was this emotion ? she whispered in her heart.

"I shall often think of this moorland tarn, when I am far away," said the officer.

"You leave this soon, then ?" she remarked.

"Yes ; I am, ere long, going back to India."

"My brother Denzil has gone there to join his regiment."

Had the stranger asked the almost inevitable military question, "What regiment?" a little discovery might have been made ; but he was full of the girl's beauty, and thought of that only. Something of admiration or of ardour in his eyes inspired her with confusion, and abruptly closing her book as on the preceding day, she rose from the bank on which she had been seated, and said, with a little trepidation,

"I am going now, and—and here our sketching and meetings must end."

"Ah ! why ?"

"I fear," she stammered as she spoke, aware that her speech was full of awkwardness—"I fear that I have done wrong in—

"What ?"

"Engaging in quite a flirtation with a total stranger."

"You cannot flirt—you are too sensible and artless ; neither could I—with you, at least."

"Have you never flirted?" asked Sybil, laughing to cover what she felt to be a second mistake.

"Often."

"Then why not with me?" she asked naïvely and archly.

"First, tell me what is flirtation?"

"I know what it is ; but cannot define or describe it."

"Shall I make the attempt?"

"Do, please," said Sybil, now laughing outright.

"It is neither coquetry nor exactly playing at courtship. It is one of those things most difficult indeed of description and of definition. It depends so much upon the time and place, the tone and tenor of those who attempt it, and on the mood of the moment, whether it be sad or gay. It is perilous work among the young and beautiful, as it is often so much mere nonsense and yet is so much more dangerous to one's peace of mind than any nonsense, could ever be. It is not so earnest or solemn as deliberate love-making, and yet it is not quite a mockery of it. It is a sharp weapon in the hands of the wary ; but a dangerous pastime for those who have had no experience in *affaires du cœur*. It is a kind of love-making that commits one to no promise and yet may raise the proudest and wildest anticipations in the breast and elicit the most unwary confidence. Thus it is difficult to find where flirtation exactly begins, and still more to say where it may end—perhaps in real love and marriage. I fear I have read you quite a dissertation on the subject, a most hazardous one while looking into your bright eyes ; and now tell me," added the officer, his tone and manner becoming more soft and earnest, "have you not done injustice to yourself and to me, for in all we have talked over so pleasantly both yesterday and to-day has anything of this vague kind been attempted?"

"Most certainly not," replied Sybil, laughing again.

"With *you* it would indeed be perilous for me," said the officer, taking her hand caressingly between his own ; "for I could not feign, where I would rather feel."

His eyes were dark and deep, their colour a kind of blue, difficult to define, but unfathomable in expression, though very soft just then ; and now Sybil grew pale, for if the speaker was not flirting, he had suddenly slid into downright love-making ; so she said, with an effort—

"We have been here more than an hour ; am I not detaining you from your friends?"

"Perhaps," said he, with an air of pique ; "pardon me for looking at my watch. Two o'clock, by Jove ! and I promised to

meet the Trecarrel girls on the Camelford road half-an-hour ago. I shall catch it from little Rose for this ! And now good morning —pardon me again if I have seemed intrusive, but I do not despair of our meeting again."

He had mounted while speaking, and, lifting his hat with studious politeness, cantered off, while Rajah went bounding and barking before him.

"What a bright little fairy it is—and so clever with her pencil ! who the deuce *can* she be ?" he was thinking, while Sybil, with a vague sense of disappointment and doubt, looked after him, half fearing that she had been too pointed in her hint that he should leave her ; and yet how were they to continue such meetings as strangers.

In her lonely life, at least latterly, since they had settled at Porthellick, she had met but few persons, and with none so pleasing as this young officer.

She hoped to meet him again on a more recognisable footing, for she felt that, though stolen interviews might be very sweet, they could not be without some peril ; and, to the young girl's mind, it seemed that the formation of the acquaintance—the whole adventure—was quite like some of the episodes to be read of in novels ; for a box from "Mudie's" came regularly to Porthellick Villa, and perhaps, by the laws of such literature, her strange friend might prove a peer of the realm—a prince, it might be, incog.—who could say ?

Sybil lingered long by the lonely tarn, watching the white swans floating among the broad-leaved water-lilies, thinking over all the stranger had said, recalling the pleasantly-modulated tones of his voice and the expression of his dark blue eyes (if blue they were), till the sound of hoofs on the distant highway drew her attention in that direction, and, with something perhaps of jealousy and pique, she saw him gallop past with two ladies, both well mounted on bright bay horses. They were the Trecarrels, dashing and handsome girls ; and the sound of their merry voices and ringing laughter came clearly over the moor as they rode at a scamper towards Lanteglos, on the roof of the old parish church of which the arms of the Trelawneys and Trecarrels have been carved for centuries.

"And these girls have him with them always," thought she, as she turned homeward. "What matter is it to me—the acquaintance of a couple of days ? Why should the idea of him affect me so ?"

After this day she sought the vicinity of the rock-pillar and the tarn no more.

She was too open and candid in all her actions, and loved her mamma too well, to conceal ultimately from her the pleasant in-

terviews she had by the moorland tarn “with such a delightful young man,” but there her confidence ended; she did not give the additional information that on three successive Sundays, when mamma was too ill to attend church, he had lingered or walked by the side of her basket-phæton, to the manifest annoyance of the Misses Trecarrel; or that she had faintly promised, *some* day, to make with him a joint sketch of certain rocks upon the sea-shore; still less did she whisper that in her secret heart she liked him well, or trusted to time or chance for the establishment of an interchange of thought as yet concealed, “as though the bridge between them was yet too frail to cross;” and Constance, occupied solely by solicitude concerning the now protracted absence of her husband, did not at first make any inquiries.

Sybil found the stranger’s image, his tones and words, recurring perpetually to her mind in spite of herself, and she blushed at the conviction. She had few male friends—beyond the burly rector and old village doctor, perhaps none—and certainly none that she had met elsewhere proved so graceful and winning as this unknown admirer. To her partial eyes he seemed the beau-ideal of manly beauty, while to those of others—even the Trecarrel girls—he was simply a passably handsome fellow.

“Why do I think of him at all?” she would ask of herself; “though so young, he may be married, or engaged—engaged, perhaps, to that Rose Trecarrel of whom he seemed so much afraid the other day. Yet he may surmise the same of me—I, Sybil Devereaux, married!” and then she laughed at her own conceit.

“There is a depth in the human heart which, once stirred, is long, long, ere its waters again subside;” and this depth he had contrived to stir in the heart of Sybil. She who had seemed as bright as the day, and happy as the blackbird that sang on the adjacent rose-trees, became silent and thoughtful, and apt to indulge in dreamy moods.

Old Winny Braddon was the first to detect this; and so she set herself to watch, and hence the hints she gave to Constance—hints which caused the production of the sketch-book, with some confusion on Sybil’s part, as recorded in our tenth chapter; and she took her young favourite to task in the usual mode of old nurses, by commenting upon the enormity of thinking of love or marriage at her years.

Now Sybil, like every young girl of her age, had her day-dreams of a lover—just such a lover as this—but she had not, as yet, thought of marriage. Such a catastrophe—such a separation from “dearest mamma”—had not quite entered her mind; but now, by Winny Braddon’s remarks, it seemed to be thrust

upon her consideration. She blushed and felt abashed, as if the modesty of her nature had been assailed ; and her girlish mind was filled with a vague sense of dread and awe, she knew not of what or of whom.

However, it chanced that on the last day he had lingered by the side of her pony-phaeton for a few minutes, resting his arms on the side thereof in such a way that she could not, without positive rudeness, have driven off, she had been resolving—but not without a struggle in her heart—that she would place herself in his way no more.

"This must end," had been her thought ; "it is most unfair to poor mamma, and is unwise for my own peace of mind ;" and it was while she thus determined, he came to her smiling, and, leaning on the side of the little phaeton, when the Trecarrels were conversing with the rector's family, said in his pleasant voice—

"Shall we ever resume the little discussion we had so merrily on that delightful day beside the old rock-pillar ?"

"Discussion—on what ?" asked Sybil, timidly.

"Flirtation, Miss Devereaux."

"What ! you know my name ?"

"Yes ; I am happy to say I do now, Sybil Devereaux."

"How came this to pass ?"

"Simply enough ; the Trecarrel girls told me."

"But I do not know them," said Sybil, with a tone of pique.

"May I have the pleasure of introducing —"

"Excuse me, please, but not just now," said she, hastily, remembering how her father had ever avoided the family of the General.

"And now I must tell you my name—Audley Trevelyan, late of the 14th Hussars."

"I have surely heard it before," said Sybil, pondering, "but where I know not now."

It was in the *Gazette* together with that of Denzil, but she had forgotten the circumstance, and he said, smiling still—

"You may easily have heard it—the name is peculiar to Cornwall, and my uncle is Lord Lamorna."

"Indeed ! all Cornwall has heard that the late lord was a very, very proud man."

"Absurdly so ; but I must bid you adieu. Rose Trecarrel is impatient."

"We are going, Mr. Trevelyan," said that young lady, with some asperity of tone, from the window of the carriage in which she and her sister were seated ; and, lifting his hat, Audley hastened to join them. The footman threw up the carriage-steps, fussily closed the door, and they departed. So, as doubtless the

reader has foreseen, Sybil's admirer was her own cousin ; yet neither knew of the relationship.

She drove off in a somewhat dubious state of mind, amid which, as she permitted the reins to drop listlessly on the backs of her two little ponies, and allowed them to go at their own pace, she gave way to the current of thought, and ended in a quiet shower of tears, which, however, calmed and soothed her. She had an undefined emotion of pique alike at this stranger, Mr. Trevelyan, and Rose Trecarrel; and as she had been learning to love the former, she resented his extreme intimacy with the latter, and she knew all the perils of propinquity with a girl so lovely as Rose undoubtedly was.

Hence, more than ever did she resolve to avoid him, and even sought to nurse herself into emotions of anger by fancying there was something that savoured of forwardness in the mode in which he had recently addressed her. The moment she reached home, and tossed the reins to the groom, she hastened to the side of Constance.

"Oh, mamma," she exclaimed, in a tumult of excitement, "I have discovered the name of the gentleman about whom you spoke to me lately !"

"The hero of the sketch-book, and it is—what?"

"Mr. Audley Trevelyan ; don't you think it so pretty?"

Constance was silent for nearly a minute. Then, foreseeing much trouble and danger if this intimacy were permitted to ripen before her husband's return, and the full recognition of herself, her son, and daughter in their proper place, and in society in general—society, "that Star Chamber of the well-bred world"—she said, with grave energy, while taking Sybil's flushed face between her soft white hands—

"Promise to me, darling, that you will meet him no more—at least, until advised by your papa."

"I give you my promise, dearest mamma."

"Remember that he is the friend, the guest, of those Trecarrels whom your papa has ever avoided for reasons best known to himself, though they seem people of the best style ; and you owe this obedience to him in his absence."

"Have no fear for me, mamma ; I shall ever obey you," replied Sybil, as she threw her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her to conceal the tears that were welling up in her fine dark eyes.

CHAPTER XII.
THE PIXIES' HOLE.

ON the following evening Sybil had set forth on an errand of charity to one of the many poor who blessed the bounteous hand of her mother—the widow of a fisherman who had perished during the pilchard season in the past summer—and she meant to return, as she stated, by the sea-shore.

Sybil had much cause for thought, and was somewhat disposed to linger on the way. The ample means enjoyed by her parents on the one hand, with the general seclusion of their lives on the other, and their studied avoidance of society when in England, had now given the girl much reason for reflection.

Her papa's mysterious absence too, and her mamma's nervous anxiety about American letters, were not without singularity; and why had both so sedulously abstained from all introduction to the family of the Trecarrels, who were greatly esteemed in the neighbourhood, and who were undoubtedly people of the best style? By the system of which this seemed merely a portion, she was even now debarred from having properly presented to her this Mr. Audley Trevlyan, who seemed so well disposed to admire—perhaps, to love her.

"We have made but few acquaintances and, of course, still fewer friends at Porthellick," said Sybil, half aloud; "now why is it thus—to have means in plenty, and so few to love us? What can be the reason? Mamma has some *secret*; but what can that secret be? Poor mamma—she looks so sweet always, and yet so sad at times!"

She would write to Denzil, she thought, on the subject of these mysteries, but Denzil was yet at sea, and it would be long, long before she might receive his answer; and then there would be an awkwardness in their parents' reading, as they would certainly wish to do, his letters and perceiving the doubts she had suggested—the secrets she wished to probe. Perhaps when her papa, whose especial pet she was, returned, she might venture to give some hints, to make some inquiries; and as she saw the white sails of the shipping, and the smoke of many a passing steamer, she lifted her eyes to heaven with an unuttered prayer in her heart that she might soon again hear his voice, and cast herself into his arms.

By one of those lanes peculiar to Cornwall, where the old road is sunk so deep in the ground, and the bordering walls are so high that the surrounding scenery is sometimes hidden—lanes where in summer the elms cast their leafy shadows, and the

fragrant wild rose and honeysuckle mingle with the long tangles of the bramble—Sybil reached the shore and descended to the very margin of the sea.

It was one of those evenings which, even in the last days of autumn, come to the rocky and rugged duchy, when the atmosphere is so mild and balmy that one might think it was in the early weeks of spring, when the grey cliffs and purple moorland glisten in the yellow rays as the sunlight falls softly between the flying clouds, on land and sea ; and the sparkling stream, that rolls from rock to rock on its passage to the shore, makes music in its splash as it falls from the cascade into the pool below, where the brown trout lurks in safety and unseen ; and Sybil, as she wandered on, felt, she knew not why, an emotion of calm and contentment growing in her heart.

But in its serenity and beauty the evening was deceptive, and old fishermen on the heights, and other weather-beaten salts who lingered, telescope in hand, on many a rude pier that jutted into the Bristol Channel, when looking seaward detected that which the landsman saw not—the tokens of a coming storm ; for seamen have strange instincts peculiarly their own, and can read the sky like the pages of a mighty book.

Across the sea the sun, now setting, poured a steady stream of golden radiance, like a broad and glittering pathway from the far horizon to the very shore, by the margin of which Sybil was now lingering ; and it tinted with warm light the flinty brow of many a storm-beaten headland, and those fantastic piles of grey granite which cap the hills in Cornwall, and are there called *carns*.

Seated on a fragment of rock, lulled by the regular and monotonous rolling of the surge, Sybil was immersed in thoughts of her absent father and brother, each now traversing the same sea, and yet so far apart upon its waters ; she thought of Audley Trevelyan. Should she ever meet him in society as she wished to do ? A little time and it might be too late, for Rose Trecarrel was so lovely, and already seemed to consider him as her own property ; for it was by her side he sat in church, where they used the same books, and it was she that he usually shawled or cloaked first for the carriage ; so if they were not already engaged, they might very soon be so.

Amid this reverie she was startled by a distant voice holloing, and apparently to her. She looked up, and on the summit of a cliff that overhung the shore, some two hundred feet or so above where she was seated, a man was gesticulating violently and beckoning to her.

Was he mad or tipsy ? was her mamma ill ; or what did this person mean ? She listened intently and thought she heard her

own name ; he was evidently addressing her, and pointing to the sea. At last his voice distinctly reached her ear.

"Look out, Miss Devereaux,—the tide is coming in !"

She glanced hastily round her, and a chill struck upon her heart, for the fragment of granite on which she sat was almost environed by the encroaching sea, and the stripe of yellow sand, by which she had been walking at the base of the cliffs, was nearly covered by the surf, which was already chafing white and angrily about the rocky headlands which formed the horns of a little bay.

Heedless of wetting her feet, Sybil gathered her skirts in her hand and rushed shoreward, when a greater terror smote her heart as she looked around her. The man on the cliff had disappeared ; no aid seemed nigh, and no living thing was visible save a solitary chough or red-legged crow, which was perched on a fragment of rock, from whence he eyed her in quiet security.

She was at a part of the coast where the land receded and the sea advanced between two headlands of granite, precipitous and sheer, but crowned by groves of ancient trees. The water, as yet, was smooth as a mill-pond within the bay, and reflected in its glassy depths the coast that towered above it ; while no sound came along the vast expanse of shore, save the hollow gurgle of the flowing tide, as it sought the recesses of the many caverns and fissures in the lower rocks. In the offing, however, the rising waves were edged with white, and this sign, together with the lowering sky and gathering clouds, showed that the coming night would be a rough one.

From the stripe of sandy beach, now nearly covered by the incoming sea, the only path lay round a little moss-grown slope at the base of an enormous rock, from whence it wound upward to the verge of a steep precipice and led to the deep old lane, already described. Over this mossy and angular ledge the angry tide had already rolled its spray, consequently it was too slippery for the footsteps of the affrighted girl, who, after thrice approaching it, finally shrunk back, and ran, with wetted feet, towards the centre of the bay, keeping close to the sheer cliffs, against which the flowing sea was rising fast, and beginning to surge and boom, throwing masses of foam and froth over her whole person, while the scared seagulls and puffins whirled in flights around her.

Once or twice a wild shriek escaped Sybil ; then her voice began to fail her, and she could only utter prayers that were earnest, deep, and piteous.

Wildly and despairingly she looked upward to the summits of the cliffs ; they were impending and inaccessible, by their gloomy outline fully illustrating the influence and fury of what is called

"the Atlantic drift," which is especially turned into the Bristol Channel, where the rocks, by the waves for ever heaving and rolling in mighty undulations, are worn into *concave* fronts, and form thus a hopeless barrier to the shipwrecked, and to all who might seek to ascend them.

She turned seaward with haggard eyes and wrung her poor little hands ; not a boat was near, and nothing now was visible between the horns of the bay save the smoke of some distant steamer, hull-down below the horizon line, as she sped on her way to the coast of Ireland. The flowing tide was above Sybil's ankles now ; she knew that at high water it would mount to several feet, and that ere long her drowned corse should be dashed and battered, at the sport of the waves, against those very rocks at which she glanced so despairingly !

The man who had seen from their summit and warned her—where was he now, and who was he ? He knew her name, and yet had he abandoned her to her fate in that terrible place, with the sea and the darkness closing fast around her ; for the sun had set and dun clouds were piled in stormy masses now, where so lately all was golden sheen.

Suddenly, she bethought her of a cavern in the rocks known as the Pixies' Hole, which her brother Denzil had often explored—a gloomy place, the haunt at times of the seal and of the *zart*, as old Cornish folks called the sea-urchin. It was one of those great caverns in which, in the barbarous times of old, the Cornish men took shelter from the Romans and Saxons, just as the children of Israel did from the Midianites in the dens of the mountains ; and there, by local superstition, still abode, unscared by the whistle of the adjacent railway, certain little beings known as the Pixies, who came hither from Devonshire on dark nights, mounted on the farmers' horses, and were heard to sing in its recesses while pounding their cider.

Gathering her skirts again, the poor girl dashed through the water, and ere long reaching the mouth of the cavern, clambered in breathlessly, falling, the while, more than once on her tender hands, when her feet slipped, on the glassy surface of the seaweedy rocks and stones, which covered all the ascent to this gaunt and gloomy place of refuge.

She knew that it penetrated far inland, and hoped that there for a time she should be safe ; but there would be hours of darkness, cold, and captivity to endure, ere the ebb of the tide would permit her to escape, and by that time what must be the terror of her poor mamma !

When fairly within this place her courage rose a little, for she saw that it closely resembled a grotto she had frequently visited and sketched—the Cave of Porthmellin. The floor of this great

fissure in the rocks ascended at an angle from the shore, and as the tide advanced, Sybil found herself compelled to retire further and further still, inward and upward amid its dreary uncertainties, while the rising tide, now rolling into the bay with the full force of a west wind, began to surge with a sound as of thunder, about the mouth by which she had entered, and that orifice seemed to lessen rapidly as the water rose within it.

The roar of the sea woke a hundred weird echoes amid the impenetrable gloom beyond her ; while the view outward from the point now attained by the breathless and affrighted girl, for a time proved strange and, to her artistic eye, full of wonderful effects. The walls of rock were dark, and yet so polished by time and the seas of ages as to emit reflected light, and to reveal little pools of crystal water lying still and motionless in fissures and crevices, where star-fish, shells, and hermit-crabs had been left by the last ebb-tide.

With growing terror Sybil could perceive that by each successive wave the mouth of her refuge grew smaller, and it was evident that ere long it would be covered by the sea, while she should be shut within !

A cry escaped her with this awful conviction ; but she uttered no more, for the echoes of her voice came back to her strangely, and with melancholy variations, as if from vast distances. If the cavern mouth were totally submerged, should she be suffocated ; or if not, might she otherwise too surely die of cold, and lie there till some holiday explorer, or some boy in search of puffins' nests, found her remains ? A cold current of air that swept past her from within the cavern warned her that it had an outlet somewhere ; but it filled her soul with greater terror, for she remembered to have heard Denzil, old Derrick Braddon, and others say, that the Pixies' Hole terminated in the shaft of an old and long unused mine, down which she might fall and be dashed to a very pulp, if she ventured one foot further ; for all was gloomy horror round her now ; and as her knees yielded under her, and she sank upon them to pray, she felt the still rising tide flow over them as it had rolled completely above the rocky arch of the cave and submerged it !

Feeling the ground with her hands outspread, the unhappy girl continued to creep a few yards further in, and then she paused, for all that she knew to the contrary, on the very verge of the fatal mine !

One little while she was full of pious resignation to die, for she had lived an innocent and guiltless life. She drew from her bosom a locket and fervently kissed it, as it contained the hair of her parents and Denzil—all she loved on earth. She knelt with her bowed head between her hands to shut out the horrid

booming and sucking sounds of the sea in the lower part of the cave, and closing her eyes, as if the more to concentrate her thoughts, burst into passionate and vehement prayer.

Then anon the horror of death—and especially of *such* a death, amid gloom and darkness, unseen, unpitied, and unknown, would draw from her a piteous wail, that was lost amid the bellowing of the sea, for a storm of wind had now risen in the channel.

Of that newly-found admirer whom she had been learning to love, Audley Trevelyan, she had totally ceased to think; her heart was wholly occupied by thoughts of her papa, her mamma, her brother Denzil—all of whom she might never, never see more!

Dread of falling headlong down the shaft of the ancient mine, more than a thousand feet, perhaps, made her, we have said, pause breathlessly, and lie on the sloping floor of rock, listening to her watery death coming nearer and nearer with a gurgling sound, that, to her nervous and excited imagination, seemed like the chuckle of a destroying fiend! The dark *unspeakable* himself was alleged by the peasantry to frequent the oozy recess of the Pixies' Hole, and the bottom of the old shaft was said, by the same veracious authorities, to be haunted by the unquiet spirits of ancient miners, who had perished there in the time of old.

Rapidly, yet terribly, through the mind of Sybil, then, as she fully believed herself to be, hovering on the verge of death, came back the eighteen years of her past life; at Como, in the old palace by the Arno; among the Apennines and the wild Abruzzi; Rome, Athens, and elsewhere, all passed before her like a rapid phantasmagoria—days and hours of happiness and pleasure. The faces and voices of her parents and her brother so beloved, came vividly amid those memories of their strange and aimless wandering in foreign lands. The secret of her mother—whatever it was—she should never learn now; but gleams of hope and the desire to live, mingled with the blackness of her despair, for existence seemed sweet, and she felt so young to die, when a long life should be before her.

At Porthellick she must long since have been missed, and her fancy pictured the agony of her lonely and tender mother; the wild noisy grief of Winny Braddon, and the honest anxiety of those who might be fruitlessly seeking for her along the cliffs or through the bay by boats; seeking for her alive or dead.

All their search would be vain, for the tide was still rising, and now where she stood, not daring to go further, the water flowed above her knees. A little time, a very little time more, and she should be lying drowned, the sport of the waves within the Pixies' Hole, or borne by them in their reflux, into the mighty waste of sea that washes the rugged shore of Cornwall.

A shrill cry escaped her as the water flowed to her waist ; and gaspingly she felt with her hands for a little ledge of rock, up which she clambered, being in her terror endued by unnatural strength ; and then, dripping and despairing, she felt a numbness come over all her faculties, which prevented her responding to certain strange sounds, somewhat like those of human voices mingled with the barking of a dog, now coming out of the *inner* gloom, while again a superstitious dread, the result of Winny Braddon's teaching, began to mingle with her more solid fears and sufferings.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE TIDE IN !

FOR a little space we shall return to the pretty villa of Porthellick, and to the anxious life of her who dwelt there ; her thoughts ever with her absent son and husband. In this instance we put Denzil before his father, for the return of Richard Lord Lamorna, was looked for daily, but that of his son might be the event of years to come ; so Denzil's last fond glance ere he left her, and his calm aspect as he lay asleep and all unconscious that she hovered near his pillow, were deeply impressed on his poor mother's heart ; and now an eternity of waters rolled between them, for his ship, she knew, must be ploughing the wide Indian Ocean.

To the wayfarer along the coast-road towards the quaint village of Endellion (with its weather-beaten church, and the ivied ruins of Rhoscarrock), that white-walled villa with its rose covered peristyle buried among the pale-green drooping willows from which the locality takes its Cornish name, no better example of peace, content and quiet could be given.

Yet the place was fated to be one of anxiety and sorrow.

Seated at a little buhl escritoire in her drawing-room, Constance was lingering over the last letter from her husband, after the removal of the tea equipage, and long after Sybil had set out on her charitable mission to the fisherman's widow.

"Richard is very long in returning, surely !" was her prevailing thought, as she sat with her graceful head resting on a white and dimpled hand, quite unconscious that the sun had set beyond the sea, and that the shades of evening were deepening around her.

No upbraiding thought of that absent husband entered the gentle heart of Constance ; yet with all that heart's gentleness, she could not but think somewhat bitterly of the late Lord

Lamorna, whose unreasonable prejudices and pride of birth and station, though only the result, the growth and maturity of centuries of time, and many generations of Trevelyanys, had cost her years of anxiety, of unmerited seclusion and wandering in foreign lands under a name which was *not* that of her children's father, and thus keeping them in ignorance of their real family, its claims and rank—for the mystery had been continued, even to the gazetting of Denzil, under the name of Devereaux!

The rising wind as a sudden gust swept through the grove of willows, roused her from these thoughts, and she found old Winny Braddon, hard-featured and keen-eyed, lingering near, with anxiety depicted in her face.

"The winter is setting in early, surely," said Constance; "we are not out of autumn yet, Winny, and see how dark the evening has become!"

"*En hâv perkon gwâv*, my mother used to say, old Cornish for "in summer, remember winter," replied Winny. "A sad night it will be for the poor fellows on board ship, ma'am I fear."

"Do not say so, Winny!"

"The waves are rolling in fast, and breaking white as snow upon Tintagel Head, and all along Trebarreth Strand."

"And where is Miss Devereaux?"

"I know not, ma'am—only she has not returned."

"And she was to come by the shore!" exclaimed Constance, starting from her seat.

"The shore! do you mean the bit of sand that lies near the Pixies' Hole?"

"Yes—yes."

"The tide has long since been in—my God! oh mistress, our poor *chealveen* may be lost!" exclaimed Winny, using the old endearing local word for 'child.'

Constance closed her escritoire with trembling hands, and went, in alarm, to the windows which faced the sea. The sun, we have said, had long since set, and athwart the dim and black and stormy clouds that now hid the point of his departure, a torrent of rain was falling aslant upon the dark and foam-flecked sea, and would ere long be drenching all the rocky shore. A little time and all should be darkness, and where was the absent Sybil?

Close-hauled, and running fast before the blast for shelter in Portquin Bay, a large boat, the last, perhaps, of the autumn pilchard fishers, careening wildly over amid the foam, was seen to vanish round a promontory.

A sudden access of terror now seized the heart of Constance. Instantly a mounted servant was dispatched to the hut of the

widow, and the man soon came galloping back, with a scared visage and the tidings that Miss Devereaux had left her more than three hours ago, and had certainly descended to the beach, as she had been seen to do so. By this time, darkness had fairly set in ; rain was falling fast upon the bleak coast, and "sowing wide the pathless main," while a heavy gale from thence was dashing a flood tide upon the shore, and the soul of Constance grew sick with apprehension.

"The tide in ! oh my God—in what can I have offended Thee to be punished thus ? My Sybil—my Sybil—is the cup of my bitterness to be filled to overflowing !" she exclaimed, in a low voice as she sank upon the sofa, while Winny Braddon wrung her hands, and in the noisy grief peculiar to her class, lamented, as already said, "the darling *chealveen*" she had nursed in her bosom.

Constance would have gone forth in person to search, bleak and rainy though the night ; but she was too feeble and delicate to face the storm, nor would Nurse Braddon permit her. She sent all her servants, male and female, in search of the tidings she was terrified to hear ; and ever and anon she rushed to the front portico and looked out upon the gloomy night, to where away beyond the willow groves that grew around the villa, the bleak high road wound seaward over a bare Cornish moor, towards those clumps of old trees that crowned the rocks which overlooked the fatal Pixies' Hole.

Slowly, as if each were an eternity of time, hour after hour passed now—periods filled up by agony and the pulsations of her heart ; and ere long her watch told her that midnight was nigh.

Midnight, and her child still absent—her Sybil, the mistress of a thousand pretty, winning and affectionate ways !

Higher and more high rose the blustering wind, sweeping before its angry breath the last brown leaves of autumn ; wildly the willows seemed to lash the stormy air, as their supple branches were tossed on the stormy blast ; and from a distance up the valley came the roaring of the sea, whose waves at the horizon were brightened occasionally by a ghastly glare of lightning. Between the scudding clouds, the moon's pale crescent was visible for a time, above the ruins of King Arthur's castle on steep Tintagel Head, a tremendous bluff (which is cleft by a chasm from the mainland) adding thus to the weird and wild aspect of the night ; and what served to increase the distraction of the wretched mother, was the strange circumstance that of the several messengers she sent forth, not one had yet returned with tidings of any kind. Suspense thus became as it were, a bodily agony ; she was led to anticipate the worst ; and Winny Braddon, though her heart was a prey to the keenest alarm and

anxiety, had to use almost affectionate force to prevent her mistress, a weak and delicate little woman as she was, from sallying forth in her despair to prosecute the search in person.

Winny had but slender hope, she knew every foot of her native shore, and was old enough to remember many a dark and terrible story of the Cornish wreckers, and when many a keg of French brandy, and many a bale of good tobacco were brought from the Scilly Isles, and without the knowledge of the Coast Guard, landed slyly in some quiet nook and cavern, where those to whom they were consigned knew well when to find them ; she knew many who had perished in those secret places, when seeking for the hidden wares ; and it was for being engaged in some of these little affairs, that her brother Derrick, had to "levant" from the duchy, and become a soldier in "the master's regiment"—the Cornish Light Infantry.

Alternately Constance lay in a species of stupor on a sofa, or started to the front door, where she listened with eager ears, the rain falling on her pale face, and the wind blowing about her hair, while she could see the lanterns of the searchers, glimmering like distant *ignes fatui*, as they proceeded to and fro along the heights that overhung the sea.

Denzil, she thought, was gone on life's highway, and might never return ; their daughter drowned—their only child now it would seem, reft from them suddenly and cruelly ! What would Richard say on his return, and how was she to meet his eye ? What account was she to give of her maternal solicitude and of her stewardship ! Yet in what way was she to blame ?

Yes ! she did accuse herself. The warnings and hints of Winny Braddon came to memory. She *had* been remiss ; she had permitted Sybil to wander too much abroad with her sketch-book, and this was the end of it ; yet who, without some divine prescience, could have foreseen a catastrophe so terrible ? How often had Denzil filled her mind with fear and anxiety by his exploits among those very rocks, and by his explorations of that horrible Pixies' Hole, where, too probably, his sister had perished miserably ; yet her bold and handsome Denzil, always came back in safety to kiss and laugh away her fears and upbraidings.

"Oh why is this terrible calamity put upon me ?" she moaned, as she lay with her face covered by her hands, and her damp dishevelled hair ; "is it but the forerunner of a greater—if a greater there can be ? Can I have loved my husband and our children so much that I have forgotten to love my God !"

And for a moment or two, she actually turned over in her mind this strange idea—the first proposition of the Mystics, which was, that the love of the Supreme Being must be pure and disinterested ; that is, exempt from all views of interest, all

care of those we love on earth, and all hope of reward—tenets defended by Madame de Guyon, and advocated by the eloquent Fénelon.

A sudden knocking at the front door, and a violent pealing of the house-bell, caused her to start as if with an electric shock.

Tidings had come at last—tidings that might fill her soul with joy, or cause it to die within her.

"General Trecarrel, would speak with you, ma'am," said Winny Braddon, hurrying in with fresh excitement in her tone and manner.



CHAPTER XIV.

/ LOST.

THE stranger who had called to Sybil by name, and who had recognised her from the summit of the cliff, was no other than General Trecarrel, the same whom her parents had so studiously avoided ; but who nevertheless knew her well by sight, having seen her on many occasions when riding abroad, and on Sundays at church, whither she always drove in her little pony phaeton, and he had always admired her beauty greatly.

The General was not a very old man ; he was still looking for another command in India, and though in affluent circumstances was yet an enthusiastic soldier, who believed that military rank and stars and ribbons, were the only things in this world worth living for. He was nearly six feet in height—erect as a pike, and well built ; his features were handsome, his eyes dark and keen ; his complexion was well bronzed and dark, his short shorn hair was becoming grey and grizzled, and his manner, by force of habit, and the air to command, was brief and authoritative.

He knew in a moment the great peril of the girl on the beach below him ; he saw that already the tide was chafing in white surf at each horn of the bay, round either of which she could alone escape from the watery trap that enclosed her, unless taken off the shore by a boat. The General was on foot ; that part of the coast was very lonely and no house or hut was near ; but intent upon her rescue, he hurried away as fast as a limp in a wounded leg (he had received a ball at Ghuznee) would permit him, from place to place, in search of a boat ; but neither boat nor fisherman could be found in time to take her off that perilous beach, ere the tide covered it.

The evening darkened quickly, and the stormy wind brought faster in the stormy sea. Near the gate-lodge of his own resi-

dence, he met Audley Trevelyan strolling leisurely in the avenue with his hands in his pockets, accompanied by his huge dog, and enjoying a cigar before the bell should ring to dress for dinner ; but the havannah fairly dropped from his lips in his surprise on beholding the excited state of the usually calm and collected General Trecarrel.

"What's the row, General—what the deuce *is* the matter?" he asked.

"A dreadful thing will occur—if it has not already occurred—a poor girl on a solitary part of the beach yonder, has been cut off by the tide, and unless we can save her in ten minutes at farthest, all will be over—yes, in ten minutes!" added Trecarrel, looking at his gold watch—the gift of Sir John Keane, with whom he had served in the conquest of Cabul.

"Good Heavens, let us get a boat at once!"

"There is not one to be had—the pilchard fishers hereabout are all at sea!"

"Lower someone over the cliffs by a rope; I have gone myself, thus, for a chough's egg, more than once."

"The rocks are nearly two hundred feet in height in some places, and the poor girl—"

"Is she a lady, General?"

"Yes, and a handsome one, too."

"You know her then—she is not a stranger?"

"To me only—a Miss Devereaux, who resides at Porthellick."

"Who do you say?" shouted Audley; "Sybil Devereaux?"

"The same."

"Merciful Heavens, let us do something at once!"

"True, but without a boat what can be done?"

"She cannot, she must not, she *shall not* be left to perish thus, if I can save her!" exclaimed Audley Trevelyan, with all the impetuosity of youth, and with sudden emotions of terror, pity, and tenderness combined. He, usually so calm, quiet, and apparently unimpressionable, to the surprise of the General, now rushed to the stable-yard, and loudly, even fiercely summoned grooms, gardeners, and lodge-keepers, and with these carrying poles and stable-lanterns, hurried towards the seashore, while two messengers were despatched to the hut of a fisherman, who lived about a mile distant, to get his boat, or at least a coil of stout ropes, and they succeeded in securing the latter; but his boat was at sea, and was the same which Constance had seen running round the headland for shelter at Portquin.

The alarm spread rapidly, and soon a dozen of men at least were searching along the verge of the cliffs in the dusk. The sea was seen rolling its waves round all the little bay now, and the base of the cliffs was marked by a curling line of snow-white

foam alone. Every vestige of sandy beach had disappeared, and so had all trace of the poor loiterer whom the General had last seen there !

Many a "halloo" was uttered, but vainly, for no response came upwards from below.

Audley Trevelyan was very pale, and very silent, though deeply excited. He was not wont to indulge in self-examination, and consequently he never knew until now how dear this girl was to him—in fact, how much he had begun to love her.

The dusk deepened into darkness, and a weird effect was given to the wild rock scenery by the fitful gleams of the lanterns carried along the edges of those perilous cliffs by the searchers, who felt that they were literally doing nothing, yet in the spirit of humanity were loth to relinquish their task, in which they were now joined by the terrified and excited servants from the villa. The wind was rising fast, and its mournful voice, as it swept through the bare branches of the old groves above the bay, mingled with the booming of the waves upon the rocks below.

Audley felt almost thankful for the gloom, as it hid the workings of his features, and, like a thorough Englishman, he detested alike a scene and to be a subject for speculation ; but now the deep baying of his Thibet dog among a clump of bushes and gorse, attracted the marked attention of the searchers.

"The dog has found some track or trace ; he never barks thus, save for some cogent reason !" exclaimed Audley, as he hastened to the spot.

"Plaise, sur, the dog do hear or see summat," added Michael Treherne, an old and decrepit miner, who in his earlier years had been an "underground captain" in Botallack mine, and one of the best wrestlers in the duchy, and who had hobbled forth, staff in hand, to assist in the search ; "if the dog be on the right road, we be on the wrang. But take 'ee care, surs ; there's the shaft of a main old mine hereabouts ; and out of it, in its time, there have come many a keenly lode o' tin and goodly bunch of copper."

"I know the place, Michael," cried Audley ! "Heavens above ! she must be in the Pixies' Hole, which, as you are all likely aware, opens into the shaft."

"Just so, Mr. Trevelyan ; through that same hole the water was pumped into the sea in my grandfeyther's time—and that warn't yesterday, sur."

"How old are you, Michael ?" asked the general, lending the old man his hand.

"Seventy past ; few miners live to my time, and 'tis ten years

since I was underground," replied Treherne with a sigh; "I can mind o' ee a small booy, General, robbin' my garden o' apples."

Proceeding cautiously about a hundred yards back from the verge of the cliffs to the place where the dog was baying, they found amid the tangled gorse bushes, the mound of slag and other débris, now covered with rank grass and weeds, in the centre of which yawned the round mouth of the ancient mine; and as they drew near the dog continued to bay the louder, with its forefeet outstretched, and its nose in the air. Then it began to fawn and leap upon its master, with such ponderous gambols, that more than once he was nearly thrown to the ground.

"Down, Rajah—down, sir! keep quiet, dog," he exclaimed; and while he spoke, something like the cry of a female came to his ear; "oh, General, I see it all now! She has been driven by the tide into the Pixies' hole, and is even now on the verge of this shaft; should she be ignorant of its existence, she may fall into the mine and be dead ere she reaches the bottom!"

"It must all be over with the poor lass, Mr. Trevelyan," said the old miner, shaking his head; "hear ye *that?*"

And, as they listened, they could hear above the moaning of the wind and the surging of the sea, the sound of water pouring within the shaft of the mine, and falling apparently to a vast depth below. A sense of the deep profundity that yawned before them, made all save Audley and the old miner, Treherne, shrink, with faces that seemed pale in the fitful gleams of the lanterns, and now the latter spoke again.

"Aw dear, aw dear! dost hear, sur? The tide has risen to upper mouth o' the Pixies' Hole, and is now pouring down into the lower level o' the mine, so if the poor lady beant drowned in one place, she will be at the bottom o'tother."

There seemed to be some probability of such being the case; and though Audley was horror-struck with the suggestion, he said with apparent calmness, the result of a great effort,—

"The upper mouth you speak of, Michael, is about fifty feet below where we stand! surely the tide could never reach it, even at full flood?"

"But who will venture down to see?" asked Treherne, almost with a grin on his hard old visage.

"I shall!"

"You, Mr. Trevelyan—you, sur?"

"Yes."

"Dare you go down, Trevelyan, with that terrible sound in your ears?" asked the General, and all present murmured the

same thing, save Sybil's servants, who moaned and wrung their hands.

"Dare I go down?" repeated Audley, "when a woman is in the case—a lady—Sybil Devereaux! To whom are you talking, General? Have I not for a joke taken a letter to the Devil's Post Office, and will I shrink for this?" he asked, referring to the deep and dangerous chasm at Kinance Cove, where the sea bellows for ever with a thundering sound, and from time to time hurls a column of water furiously through an aperture, when those who are adventurous enough to descend in the dark and deliver a letter, as if to the presiding Genius of the place, will find it rudely torn from their fingers by an inward current of air, accompanying the reflux of the sea. "We have blocks and tackle with us," continued Audley; "rig them to poles laid across the shaft, and by Jove, I'll go down with a lantern; quick, my lads, for God's sake lose no time!"

"Are you not afraid of gas—or foul air, Trevelyan?" asked the General.

"I don't mean to go to the bottom."

"Of course not, but if the rope should break?"

"In that case, it won't matter what I meet with," was the grimly significant reply; "but be careful, my good fellows, for I trust my life to you in this instance."

"If the tackle did break, thee'd soon be in jowds" (*i.e.*, pieces), said Treherne, with a saturnine smile.

An oar and a stout pole, which two of the party carried, were laid across the mouth of the shaft.

A double-sheaved block was securely lashed to them; a strong rope was rove through the sheaves, and a species of cradle was formed for the adventurous Audley Trevelyan.

Long familiar with his native rocks, the latter when a bold boy had clambered by Bodrigan's Leap at Portmellin,* when seeking for puffins' nests, and could look without shrinking from the steeps of Gurnard's Head, Tol Pedn Penwith, and the fantastic cliffs of Tintagel. He had been doted on by the miners, with whom he had often descended the deepest shafts, clad like themselves in flannel shirt and trousers. Thus attired, he had explored the vast levels and silent galleries by the dim light of a feeble candle, while, as Sybil told of Denzil, he could

* So called from Sir Henry Bodrigan, who in the reign of Henry VII. sprang down the cliff, when flying from his neighbours Trevannion and Edgecumbe, who sought to capture or slay him. He was so little injured by the fall, that he reached a vessel sailing near the shore, and escaped to France. A mound, called the Castle Hill, and a farm-house, once part of a splendid mansion, are all that now remain of the abode of this fine old Cornish family.

hear the roar of the Atlantic over his head, and the boulders dashed by its force on the bluffs of the Land's End ; and thence beyond, in levels half a mile out at sea, where the passing ships glided like silent phantoms many a fathom far above where he wandered.

Fearlessly he tied himself to the cradle which old Michael Treherne prepared for him ; a lantern was hung at his neck, leaving his arms free, and now a dozen of strong and careful hands were laid on the ropes.

"Lower away, my lads," cried he, almost gaily ; and with something like a gasp of anxiety in his throat, the General saw his young friend's face disappear as they lowered him into that awful orifice, the mouth of a shaft that went down a thousand feet and more.

"Steady, my booys !" cried old Treherne, in a species of glee.

Those who witnessed this descent were none of them, perhaps, very impressionable men ; yet even to them there was a gloomy horror in the idea of the vast profundity of the deserted mine, over which Trevelyan swung ; and the wildness of the night, the storm at sea, the whistling and howling of the wind as it swept the rocky promontories, and rolled the waves in foam against them, were not without their due effects upon the mind.



CHAPTER XV.

THE SEARCH.

"HE'S a brave booy, sartainly !" said old Michael Treherne, admiringly, in his queer Cornish accent, "it is like him and like his family—the Trevelyan's of Rhoscadzhel.

By Tre, Pol and Pen,
We know the Cornish men.

He'd face Tregeagle himself—lower away gently, lads. His ancestors existed hundreds of years ago ; and for the matter o' that, I spose so did mine ; we be all Cornish *keth*."^{*}

Audley Trevelyan would freely have risked his life to save anyone—of course a woman more than all ; but how glorious was this ! The peril he risked—for no ordinary amount of nerve was requisite for him who swung thus over the profundity of the ancient mine—was for his lovely little friend of the sketch-book ; the Naiad of the moorland tarn—she who seemed not indisposed to love him, and whose heart he might yet make his own.

* People.

"But Heaven!" thought he; "that impulsive little heart may be—alas—still enough by this time!"

And, even as this disastrous fear occurred to him, the roar of the falling water was heard on the lower level of the empty mine, more than a thousand feet below him, while the lantern he carried cast strange gleams on the damp, slimy, and discoloured masonry of the shaft, after he left behind, or rather above him, the fringe of weeds and gorse that grew about the mouth; yet in less than a minute he was assured that the water he heard falling proceeded, not from the flow of the tide, as he and his companions foreboded, but from some subterranean spring falling into the shaft, far *below* the upper entrance of the Pixies' Hole; and anything more weird, dreary, and ghastly than that cavernous fissure which now opened off it on one side, and which he was preparing cautiously to explore, it would be difficult to conceive.

From its rocky and ragged mouth, which was covered with white and pendant stalactites and hideous fungi, on which the light of his lantern fell with fitful rays, its interior receded away into dark and gloomy blackness and uncertainty.

"Good Heaven!" muttered Audley, "the poor girl cannot be here. Should she have fallen down the shaft?" was his next terrible thought.

"Are ee saafe, sur?" cried Treherne, peering down from above.

"All right, old fellow—stop lowering and make fast the rope; I am just at the place, and a horrid one it is."

Ere he entered it, and cast off the cradle by which he had descended, he could hear in the obscurity beyond the surging or gurgling sound of the tide at the lower end; and a nervous chill that he might find Sybil drowned came over his heart.

"Well, by Jove!" he muttered; "of all the places in this world to search for a young lady, who would think of this—down the shaft of a devilish old copper-mine? I have seen some queer things in India, but this out-herods them all!"

Carrying the lantern so that its light should precede and guide his steps, he had barely gone twenty paces when he discerned something white amid the dense gloom. Within but a few feet of the still encroaching water, a female figure was lying on a shelf of rock, from which she started into a half-sitting posture, and gazed upward at him with a wild and startled expression, in which hope and fear, joy and wonder, were singularly mingled.

She was that Sybil Devereaux of whom he was in search; her dress—a white piqué—all soiled, bedabbled, and wet, her fine dark hair dishevelled and sodden, her hat and veil gone, and her whole aspect forlorn and pitiable.

"I am saved!" she exclaimed, in a wailing and excited voice;

"I thank Heaven—I thank kind God that you are come to me ; but how—and who are you that have had the courage—"

"Audley—Audley Trevelyan—don't you know me, Miss Devereaux?" said he, as he placed the lantern on a rock, and raised her tenderly in his arms.

"Oh Audley!" she exclaimed, and her head fell upon his shoulder, for she was weak as a child and past all exertion. She had never called him by his Christian name before, and, while he felt his heart swell with a new emotion of pleasure, he ventured tenderly to kiss her cheek, and then he became aware how cold and chill it was. She seemed scarcely conscious of the act, though she said in a broken voice—

"Mamma—my poor mamma shall thank you, sir ; I cannot speak my own thoughts—they are too terrible, and my gratitude is too deep for words."

"From my soul I thank Heaven that I came in time to save you ! A little longer here, my dearest girl, and you must have perished of cold !" said he, as he perceived with genuine anxiety how pale she was, and how the whole of her delicate frame shivered ; but his words or manner seemed to recall her energies, for she tried to smile, and said—

"I shall have a strange story to write of to Denzil, and tell my papa when he returns."

"Have ee found her, zur—is the young lady saafe?" cried a voice there was no mistaking, down the snafit.

"Safe and sound, Treherne," replied Trevelyan, whose voice made strange echoes in the cavernous recesses of the place ; "we shall come up together, so take care, my friends, for there will be a heavier strain on the rope—a double weight now. Permit me to lead you, Miss Devereaux—or may I not call you Sybil?" he added, as his voice trembled a little.

"You may call me what you please," replied Sybil, with something of her usual frankness ; "I owe my life to you," she added feebly, while clinging to his arm.

"To me, after Rajah, who guided us here, no doubt on hearing you cry for aid ; so, with the permission you accord, I shall call you Sybil—yes, dearest Sybil, permit me to blindfold you."

"Why?"

"You may become giddy—terrified."

"I submit myself to you," she answered, and he tied his handkerchief over her eyes ; and, while doing so, to resist touching her lovely little lips with his own was impossible.

"Pardon me for this, Sybil," said he, as the action brought a little colour to her pale cheek, "but I love you, love you dearly. Elsewhere we shall talk of this ; come, allow me to be your guide."

"Shall we not wait till the tide ebbs, and escape by the sands?" she asked, and shrinking as his arm encircled her.

"Dearest girl, you would die of cold ere that took place."

Thus, from terror and despair on Sybil's part, and from a proud and joyous sense of exultation on that of Trevelyan, there came about abruptly a *dénouement* which might have been long of developing itself, even with those who were so young and enthusiastic—a declaration of love upon one hand, and a tacit acceptance of it on the other, for gratitude mastered the regard already formed in the heart of the girl.

Audley was now in that delightful state of the tender passion, when to see even the skirt, to hear the voice, or to breathe the same atmosphere with its object, had a charm; then how much greater was the joy of having her all to himself, and to feel that, too probably, she owed her life to him!

"You do not—do not—love—" she faltered and paused.

"Whom?"

"Rose Trecarrel?"

"I love but you, and I bless God for the opportunity given me for testifying that love, by serving and saving you, Sybil—dear Sybil, for so let me call you now and for ever."

"What the deuce *are* you about, Trevelyan? Do you mean to stay down there all night—or is the lady ill? That dreary hole can be neither romantic nor pleasant, I should fancy."

It was the voice of the General hailing him now.

"Here we come, sir," replied Audley, as he fastened the rope-cradle securely round his body and courageously took Sybil in his arms. It was, no doubt, delightful to hold her in an embrace so close, and to feel her clinging to him; but a thrill of intense anxiety passed over all his nerves, and it seemed as if the hair of his head bristled up, when he found himself swinging at the end of a rope over that dreadful abyss, down which the lantern, as it chanced to fall from his hand, vanished as if into the bowels of the earth, for the lower level of that old mine was far below the sea. As for poor Sybil, she felt only a terror that amounted to a species of torpor—a numbness of all sense.

"Now pull together, my boos!" cried the cheerful voice of Michael Treherne; "one, two—one, two—*ho*, and here they come out of the *knacked bal!*" for so the Cornish miners designate an abandoned mine, as it is among his class, and in the mines, that words of the old language linger.

And in less than a minute, Audley and Sybil were at the surface and in the grasp of strong hands that placed them safely on terra firma, when, overcome by all she had endured, the latter immediately fainted.

"The poor child is as wet as a *quilquin*" (a frog), said Treherne with commiseration.

"She requires instant attention," said the General kindly ; "let her own servants take her at once to your cottage, Treherne, as it is the nearest place in this stormy night. See to this, Audley, while I hurry down to Porthellick and relieve the anxiety of her mother. Give orders to have the carriage sent there for her. By the way, Audley, is not this the girl that Rose chaffs you about?"

"The same, sir," replied Trevelyan, whose heightened colour was unseen in the dark.

"How strange ! Rose is such a quiz, you will never hear the end of this."

"She is the daughter of an officer—a Captain Devereaux."

"I have never met him—of what corps?"

"I don't know."

"To Mike's cottage with her, and lose no time. Here my lads, all of you go to Trevanion's Tavern, and score to me what you drink. The night is rough and wet."

"Thank'ee sir," replied Treherne, while the others all bowed and scraped and pulled their forelocks ; "my old woman 'll keep the young lady safe, till her pony-kittereen or your carriage comes for her ; and we'll drink your health, and Mr. Trevelyan's too—aye, and the old Cornish toast of 'Fish, tin, and copper,' in summat better than Devonshire cider."

So, while Sybil in Audley's care was taken to the cottage of the old miner, and the latter with those who had joined in the search departed to enjoy the bounty of the General, the latter limped off to visit Constance and relate the story of her daughter's escape and safety.



CHAPTER XVI.

INTELLIGENCE AT LAST.

ON seeing Constance without her bonnet, and with her dark hair somewhat in disorder, the first impression of the General was, how extremely like her daughter she proved, and how very youthful too ; for her figure, as we have elsewhere said, was *petite* ; her features were minute, beautiful and full of animation at all times, but never more so than now, when she started forward on the entrance of the visitor, with her delicate hands uplifted, her fine eyes sparkling through their tears, full of hope and inquiry, and her lips parted, showing the whiteness and faultless regularity of her teeth.

" You have news for me, General?" she faltered.

" Happily, good news, madam," said he, bowing low; " your daughter is safe and well."

" Oh, sir—oh, General Trecarrel, how can I thank you?"

" By composing yourself, my dear madam," he replied, leading her to a chair; but Constance became almost hysterical; she clasped his hand in hers, and almost sought to kiss it, in expression of her deep gratitude, greatly to the confusion of the old soldier, who was Englishman enough to dislike a " scene."

" Under the circumstances, no apology is necessary for the abruptness of my visit," said he; " we are pretty near neighbours, and I hope shall ultimately be friends, though, singular to say, I have never had the pleasure of meeting Captain Devereaux."

These words recalled Constance to a sense—the ever-bitter sense—of the awkwardness of her position, and she faltered out—

" Captain Devereaux is absent at present—abroad indeed—but I hope he will soon be home now. And our dear daughter—she escaped the rising tide—"

" By fortunately being able to find shelter in the Pixies' Hole, from which she was promptly rescued by a young friend—a brother-officer of mine."

" Oh, how I shall bless him and ever treasure his name."

" He is Mr. Audley Trevelyan, and has conveyed her, in the first place, to old Mike Treherne's cottage. She was drenched by rain and spray, suffering from chill, and overcome with terror."

" My poor little Sybil!"

The General did not add to the mother's alarm by adding that he had left Sybil insensible, but only said—

" She should not return till to-morrow, when perhaps the rain may cease, and the storm abate; but I have ordered my carriage, and she shall have the use of it with pleasure. It must be here in a few minutes now."

Constance could only murmur her heartfelt thanks; but now, more than ever, she felt the peculiarity of her position—its extreme awkwardness, and its doubtful aspect. It was but a few weeks since her husband, now known as Lord Lamorna, had stood by the General's side at the late lord's grave, amid a crowd of bareheaded tenantry, and here they were talking of him as " Captain Devereaux!"

Sybil's cousin-german had saved and protected her, thus cementing the acquaintance begun by chance at the little lake upon the moor, and was with her now too, probably; he was her husband's nephew, and while that husband was absent, with

her own rank, name, and his concealed, she dared not avow the relationship that existed among them all ! Poor Constance felt her cheek grow paler, with the sickly thoughts that oppressed her heart, as she muttered under her breath—

“ Patience yet a while, and, with God’s help, dear Richard shall see me through all this !”

In a few words the General, with military brevity, related the whole affair of the evening ; the providential discovery of her daughter in the chasm, by her voice, as it was rightly conjectured, having reached the ears of Audley’s Thibet mastiff ; but for which circumstance she must have perished of cold and exhaustion, or perhaps fallen down the shaft of the old mine and never been heard of again, her fate remaining a mystery to all—contingencies, the contemplation of which appalled the heart of the poor mother, who said in a very faint voice—

“ My daughter is long in returning to me. Oh, sir, can it be that you are kindly concealing something from me ?”

“ Nay, madam, the tempestuous state of the weather and the feeble condition of the young lady herself require——”

“ Ah, that is it ! my daughter is ill—dying perhaps, while I am idly talking here. Winny—Winny Braddon, my bonnet and cloak ; I shall set forth this instant for Treherne’s cottage !”

“ I assure you, madam, that my carriage was at her disposal, and it shall bring your daughter home.”

“ Oh, General, the gratitude of my heart——”

“ There—there, please don’t thank me for a little common humanity,” continued the kind old soldier, “ but give my compliments—General Trecarrel’s compliments—to Captain Devereaux when he returns, and say that I think he ought, in etiquette, to have waited upon me as his senior officer ; for such was the fashion in my young days, when two brethren of the sword took up their quarters in a district so secluded as this ; and I should like my girls to know your daughter.”

“ I have a son, too, General—my dear Denzil—who left us but lately to join his Regiment.”

“ Ah—indeed—you quite interest me. Where is it stationed ?”

“ In India—far, far from me.”

“ Of course, you could not have him always at your apron-strings. What, or which, is his corps ?”

“ The Cornish Light Infantry.”

“ My own Regiment ! I am the full colonel of it : why did he not leave a card with me on appointment ?—he must have known of my whereabouts.”

A cloud came over the fair open countenance of Trecarrel, and Constance felt that, in the further prosecution of their sys-

matic incognito, a breach of military etiquette and punctilio had taken place.

"My young friend Trevelyan is in the same corps," said the General, after a pause.

Constance knew that too, and that it had been the Regiment of her husband during their happiest days at Montreal; but when with it he had borne his family surname, and *not* that of Devereaux.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!"

So thought Constance, who could not quite foresee the end of the web. Her present perplexities were increasing, and her usually pale cheeks began to blush scarlet.

But now, to her intense relief, the sound of wheels and hoofs at the door, followed by quick steps in the entrance, announced an arrival, and in a moment more mother and daughter were weeping joyfully in each other's arms.

"Dearest mamma—darling mamma! Oh the joy of being safe with you again! An age seems to have elapsed since I left you this evening!"

And old Winny Braddon came in for her share of caresses, while the General and Trevelyan, though they now began to feel themselves rather *de trop*, looked on with smiles of pleasure. So full of joy was Constance at the restoration of Sybil, that she never noticed the quaint and coarse (though comfortably dry) costume which the careful wife of Treherne had substituted for her wet and sodden habiliments.

Audley's quick and practised eye saw that Constance was a woman possessing more than an ordinary share of beauty and refinement. He took in the whole details of the drawing-room, and perceived by a glance that the occupants of this secluded villa in the "willow-glen—those peculiar Devereaux," as the Tre-carrel girls called them, were evidently people of the best and most cultivated taste, for the buhl or marquetterie tables, consoles, and cabinets exhibited selections from the most chaste productions of Dresden and Sèvres; delicate Venetian bronzes, quaint Majolica vases and groups, some relics from Herculaneum; and other objects (more familiar to him) from India and Burmah were there—four-armed gods and other idols in silver or ivory.

Pausing for a moment in her caresses, Constance turned towards Audley Trevelyan with a pleading glance of irresolution, yet one of wonderful sweetness.

"My young friend, Mr. Trevelyan," said the General; "allow me to introduce him, Mrs. Devereaux."

"Oh, sir, to you I owe the gratitude of a lifetime?" she exclaimed in an accent of touching tenderness.

He seemed so like her absent Denzil, that all her heart yearned to him, and in a genuine transport of gratitude she embraced him with such *empressement*, that in a woman so young apparently for her maternal character, and so very handsome too, rather perplexed Trevelyan, who said,

"You owe me no thanks—indeed, indeed, you do not. I did but my duty—I obeyed only the dictates of humanity; and I assure you that you are quite as much indebted to Rajah as to me, Mrs. Devereaux."

The name he used recalled her to herself, and the peculiarity of her position as regarded *him*—the secret she could not yet reveal; and turning away as an expression of confusion came over her face, she stooped, and casting her arms round the great Thibet mastiff, caressed it with a grace and playfulness that partook of girlish glee.

By this time Sybil was reclining wearily, and with an air of utter exhaustion and languor, on a sofa. Her face was very pale, save when a kind of hectic flush passed over it, and her eyes seemed unnaturally bright. Even to the unpractised observation of the two gentlemen it was evident that they had better retire, and, after exchanging a glance suggestive of this, they both rose, hat in hand.

"You will, I hope, permit me to call to-morrow and make inquiries?" said Audley Trevelyan.

Constance bowed, and her tongue trembled: what she said she scarcely knew, but it was a muttered wish of some kind, with many thanks and reference to her husband's return, all oddly combined. That she laboured under some species of hidden restraint was quite apparent to the perception of him she addressed, and also to the General; and so, after the usual well-bred wishes that both ladies would soon recover from the effects of their recent terror, they withdrew together; and as the sound of their carriage wheels died away in the willow avenue, all other sounds, and the light too, seemed to pass away from Sybil, as she sank gradually back, became insensible, and was conveyed to bed by Winny Braddon and her startled mother, who summoned medical aid without delay.

The next day found her in a species of nervous fever. She had undergone too much of mental fear and bodily suffering for a nature so delicate as hers, and remained for a time unconscious of all around her. Slowly and gradually, like water filtering through a rock—as some one describes the struggles of returning sensibility—she became aware that she was in her own bed, with her mother on one side and Winny Braddon on the other

in watchful attendance ; then, with a shudder, she would recall the horrors she had escaped, and clasp her hands as she had done ten years before, when a little child in prayer.

Then exhaustion would bring sleep, but a sleep haunted by dreams, and, at times, visions wild as those of an opium-eater ; thus, for many a night, long after this period, the episodes of that eventful evening would come back to memory with all their harrowing details : the advancing tide rolling against the impending cliffs and thundering in the Pixies' Hole, after it had swallowed the drenched sand ; her retreating step by step fearfully and breathlessly before it, in terror of being drowned on one hand and of falling down the mine on the other !

Anon, she would imagine herself swung up that terrible shaft through darkness and space, and that the rope was just on the eve of *parting*, when she would wake with a half-stifled scream to find that she was in the arms of her mamma, who was soothing and caressing her.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRECARRELS.

DULY next day, at a proper visiting hour, the handsome and well appointed carriage of General Trecarrel, occupied only by his two daughters and Audley Trevelyan, was seen bowling down the avenue of the villa at Porthellick, with Rajah bounding before it in as much glee as if at home in Thibet, "the northern land of snow," where many a time he had scoured along the slopes of the Himalaya range and the Dwalaghiri in pursuit of the Cashmere goat and the Tartarian yak ; but as the event proved, the visit was in vain : the two ladies could only leave their cards, as they were informed that both Mrs. and Miss Devereaux were too much indisposed after the events of yesterday to receive visitors.

"It will be a case which warm drinks and cosseting will soon cure, I hope," said Rose, shrugging her pretty shoulders.

"Where to, Miss Trecarrel?" asked the footman, touching his hat ere he sprang to his place behind.

"To Bodmin," replied the elder sister : "we have shopping to do, Mr. Trevelyan," and after a pause she added, "I have told you that they were odd people, those Devereaux ; we were fools to come—don't you think so, Rose?"

"Perhaps, Mab."

"Do not judge so harshly," urged Audley. "What may be

more probable than that both should feel excited after the last night's terror and—and—”

“Chivalry,” suggested Rose Trecarrel, a little malice glittering in her fine eyes; but Audley remained silent.

Mabel and Rose Trecarrel were both eminently handsome girls. The elder was tall and showy, having dark grey eyes that filled, at times, with unusual lustre and had a wonderful variety of expression, but her chief beauties were perhaps her purity of complexion and the quantity and magnificence of her rich brown hair.

Rose was somewhat her counterpart—a large but very graceful girl, with clear, sparkling, hazel eyes, and hair much of the same hue, though her lashes and eyebrows were dark and well defined. Without attempting to describe her nose, we shall simply say it was a very pretty one, that seemed exactly to suit the expression of her eyes and the full-lipped yet little and alluring mouth below. Both girls were always dressed rather in the extreme of the mode, and were sure to be prime favourites at all balls, races, or meets to see the hounds throw off; and no entertainment in that part of the duchy was deemed complete without “the Trecarrels.” No friend had ever accused them of being flirts, though fair enemies had frequently done so.

The General was very proud of his two daughters, and felt certain that both would make most eligible and wealthy marriages, when he took them to India, where he was in expectation daily of obtaining an important command.

For the time Audley Trevlyan was, what others had been, and others yet might be, a kind of privileged dangler in attendance on both sisters, and seemed to share their smiles and return attention to both in a pretty equal manner; thus both were somewhat disposed to resent the new and sudden interest he manifested in Sybil Devereaux.

Both were eminently dashing girls. Mabel the elder, was perhaps the statelier of the two, but the beauty and manner of Rose were more sparkling and dazzling. Both sisters were highly accomplished, and both had that affected indifference to their own attractions, which is perhaps an indication of the strongest and most ineradicable vanity—for of those attractions they knew the full power and value.

“But *who* are those Devereaux?” asked Mabel, as a turn of the road hid the villa, during a pause filled up only by the subdued noise of the carriage wheels in their patent axle-boxes.

“*You* should know by this time, Trevlyan,” added Rose, looking at him from under the long fringes of her eyes and her parasol, as she lay well back indolently yet gracefully among the soft cushions of the carriage.

"Nay ; how should I, when you, who are neighbours, know nothing ? Her father was a captain in some Line Regiment."

"*Her* father—of whom were we speaking ?" asked Rose.

Trevelyan coloured perceptibly, and Mabel laughed.

"Oh, she occupies his thoughts already, Mab ! He was of some Line Regiment, that is pretty vague, and scarcely suits our Cornish standard of such things as family and so forth—least of all the standard formed by your uncle, the late Lord Lamorna."

"Oh, he was an absurd old goose—mad with pride, in fact."

"And barely remembered you in his will ?"

"Precisely so," replied Audley, half amused and half provoked.

"They visit no one, and they make no acquaintances," said Rose, resuming the theme.

"They settled here without an introduction, I have heard, and gave it to be understood that they declined all acquaintance save with the Rector and Doctor."

"Neither of whom, Mab, are particular to a shade. I should not wonder, Audley, if your 'captain' were some returned convict or retired housebreaker in easy circumstances."

"Rose, you are too severe," urged Trevelyan ; "Mrs. Devereaux is a kind of idol among the poor people here."

"We must all admit that she excels in chicken broth, is knowing in coals and tea, and great in corduroys, tobacco, and blankets ; but fasten my bracelet, please," and she held forth coquettishly a slender wrist and a well-shaped hand, tightly cased in the finest of straw-coloured kid ; and every movement of Rose Trecarrel, however quick and unstudied, was full of the poetry of action. "Thanks. If you will not admit that the mother of your fair friend is odd, you must that her father is so—or at least is ignorant of military etiquette, if he *is* a military man."

"How ?"

"He has never left his card upon papa, which, in a solitary place like this, papa thinks he ought to have done, as it is the fashion in the service—going out I am aware—for the junior officer to wait upon the senior, though uninvited."

"Though a bore at times, it was a good old custom, I admit, but like many other fashions is as much gone out as square letter-paper, sand-boxes and sealing wax, stage coaches and queues."

"Then his son," she continued in an aggrieved tone, "on being appointed to papa's own Regiment, never had the politeness to leave a card upon us either !"

"Rose, you are quite a *Code Militaire*," said Trevelyan, laughing again. "Those Devereaux are thought handsome—I mean the mother and daughter."

"I have no wish to disparage the taste of the Cornish gentlemen—"

"None could afford to treat their taste with more indifference than you and Miss Trecarrel, who are both—"

"Both what?" asked Mabel, quickly.

"Above all comparison."

"Oh, we did not leave all our gallantry in the old coal-mine!"

"Excuse me, Rose," said Trevelyan, "it was originally a tin-mine."

"Pity it was not brass—eh, Audley?" replied Rose, laughing with a voice like a silver bell.

"Come, come, Rose," said Mabel, "you and Trevelyan are usually such good friends that I shall not have you to spar thus."

"We don't spar, it is only 'barrack-room chaff,' in which, as you may perceive, Mr. Trevelyan excels," retorted the piqued belle.

The truth was rather apparent to Audley, that the pretty—nay, the beautiful and hazel-eyed Rose was nettled, and seriously so. Hitherto she had considered the handsome ex-Lieutenant of Hussars, and now of the Cornish Light Infantry, as her own peculiar property—even more than her sister. He was to be her papa's Aide-de-camp in India—she had settled this, *nem con.*; and while on leave at home, he was to be her dangler, secret slave, and open admirer—husband in the end, perhaps, if nothing better "turned up;" for Audley's expectations from his father, the barrister, as one of a family of five, were slender enough; and here he was too probably smitten with a little chit-faced interloper whom no one knew anything about!

There was a pause in the conversation, during which the carriage had passed St. Teath and St. Kew, with their quaint churches, and that of Egloshayle, on the right bank of the Camel, where it peeped up among the trees, when Rose returned to the charge.

"And you actually swung together at the end of a rope."

"At the end of a rope, as you say."

"How romantic!—how charming!"

"At least in one sense; yet I was glad enough when it was all over in safety."

"What! though doubtless, as Byron says,

'The situation had its charm.'

"Fie, Rose—you quote *Don Juan*!" exclaimed Mabel.

"And why should not I, Mab, if the passage seems so familiar to you?"

"Rose, you are incorrigible!"

"Well, Audley, your fellow-soldiers must be proud of you when they hear of this feat of arms."

"We say *brother*-soldiers in the service," replied Trevelyan.

"I submit to the correction; it is like one from papa, who deems all civilians stupid fellows. And so you think she is a paragon of loveliness?" continued Rose Trecarrel, so bent on the game of tormenting him, that she cared little for showing her hand.

"I did not say so—do you, Rose?"

"Call me *Miss* Rose, if you please," said she, with a charming air of pique on her lovely little lip.

"Well—where were we?"

"About the beauty of the girl you rescued—were slung in a rope with. How funny!" said Mabel.

"Of her beauty you can judge for yourselves; I have nothing to do with it," replied he wearily.

"Fortunate for you," laughed Rose, "as the girl's position in society seems so dubious, Audley."

"Call me Mr. Trevelyan, please, as we are to be on distant terms."

"Let us only have you in India, where we shall be ere long," said she, shaking her parasol threateningly, "and I shall have papa to put you under arrest."

"For what?"

"Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

"As how, my fair friend?"

"Behaving rudely, petulantly, and insolently."

"To a pretty girl?"

"Yes—moreover, a daughter of the general on whose staff he is serving."

"And the sentence of the court will be, dismissal from her presence for ever."

"Have some mercy on him," said Mabel.

"You seem to know the duties of an aide-de-camp," said Audley, not ill-pleased to find himself an object of interest to two such handsome girls.

"Of papa's at least," said Rose: "to revise the dinner and visiting lists; to see Mab and me to and from all balls, kettle-drums, reviews, durbars, and so forth; to arrange picnics; to do all the squiring and shawling business, and to dance with us whenever we feel bored by some slow griff who can't keep time; to make bets of gloves, fans, and bouquets, and to lose them so nicely and so opportunely, that the payment thereof appears a veritable glory; to see us through the crush of the supper, and procure ices, creams, chicken, champagne, and crackers, no matter how the thermometer may stand, or how weary the pun-

kahwallah may be—all of which are among the duties of an accomplished staff-officer."

"Oh, Rose, how your tongue runs on!" said Mabel.

"Poor fellow, I must spare him, for his heart seems divided between the mother and daughter; so I hope that this Captain Devereaux may soon be home, lest evil happen. But here we are at Bodmin!" she added, as the carriage, after quitting the highlands of granite and dreary moorland which extend to within four miles of the ancient assize town, rolled through its centre street.

"And now, if you choose," said Mabel, "Trevelyan, you may enjoy the indispensable cigar while we investigate the industrial treasures of a country draper's shop. We have but one hour to spare, and then homeward."

"Or we shall have papa consulting that remarkable watch, which he got from Sir John Keane after the storming of Ghuznee," added Rose, as disdaining Audley's proffered hand, she sprang lightly from the carriage steps.

So, for a time he was left to "do" the lions of Bodmin, the handsome old Norman church, the few pointed arches and dilapidated walls of the Leper Hospital, and so forth; and to his own reflections and thoughts, which, heedless of the sharp banter he had undergone, were all of Sybil—at that very moment struggling back into perfect consciousness from feverish delirium, and stealing from Winny Braddon the visiting-card he had recently left, that she might conceal it under her pillow.

To her, he was fast becoming the realisation of all her day-dreams—"the one moving spirit that animated the whole world of her united romances." He was,

"Her first and passionate love, that all
Which Eve hath left her daughters since her fall."

To Rose and to Mabel Trecarrel, he was simply one among the many "nice fellows" they had met with in society, and should meet again in plenty.



CHAPTER XVIII.

HE LOVES ME, TRULY !

To Audley's mind there was a freshness and innocence about Sybil, that made her image dwell in his heart prominently, and more vividly than the dashing and showy Mabel and Rose Trecarrel could have conceived to be possible. Moreover, there was, to him, something glorious in the conviction that for the

sake of this lovely young girl he had confronted a manifest peril; that by doing so he had saved her and established—as he hoped—a tie of no ordinary strength and peculiarity between them, linking, in the future, their histories, if not their lives together ; for to him she owed now, most probably, the fact that she existed at all.

Such were the kind of thoughts to which Trevelyan, hitherto a heedless and pleasure-loving young subaltern of Hussars, indulged in many a dreamy hour, even when half flirting or “chaffing” with the Trecarrels, riding or driving abroad with them, turning the leaves at the piano while Rose displayed the perfection of her white shoulders and taper arms after dinner, and dawdled languidly over the airs of Verdi and Balfe ; and to which he fully abandoned himself, when he strolled forth alone, to enjoy a cigar in the lawn or in some secluded lane.

Sybil on her part deemed it equally delightful, to think that she owed her life to him ; for had not Audley and others said (and she felt the truth of it) that, ere the ebb of the tide should have left the lower end of the cavern open and free, she must have perished of cold or terror, or both.

She had read the contents of many a box from “Mudie’s,” but no episode in any of the three volumes octavo therein seemed exactly to resemble hers in the Pixies’ Hole. It was very romantic and strange, no doubt ; but to Constance it appeared that the still concealed part of their relationship was the most strange and romantic feature in the affair.

Like most, if not all, young girls, she had read all about love in novels and romances ; she had talked about love to school-companions, some of them enthusiastic Italian girls at Como, by the Arno, and elsewhere ; and now a lover had actually come, one who on three successive days had left cards, with earnest inquiries concerning her health and that of her mamma.

She remembered the endearment of his manner when he saved her, but feared, at times, that such might only have been caused by the peculiarity of their situation ; and then she would blush with annoyance at herself, as she recalled the somewhat too pointed way in which she questioned him about Rose Trecarrel, to whom she was still a stranger, and of whom she had thus evinced a jealousy—actually a jealousy, as if thereby assuming a right to question his actions !

But had he not called her Sybil, and said that he loved her, and her only ?

The afternoon of the fourth day saw Audley Trevelyan—always careful of his costume, on this occasion unusually so—passing slowly down the willow avenue towards the villa ; and as he approached the latter, the beating of his heart quickened

on perceiving the light figure of Sybil pass from the pillared portico into a conservatory that adjoined the house. So she was convalescent—had recovered at last; and now he would speak with her alone, and might resume perhaps the thread of that hurried but delightful topic, which was so suddenly cut short on the evening he saved her, by the voice of the impatient General.

He approached the glass door of the conservatory, which she had left invitingly open, his footsteps being completely muffled by the soft and close-clipped turf of the little lawn.

The conservatory was handsome, lofty, and spacious, floored with brilliantly coloured encaustic tiles, and constructed of iron, like a kiosk; its shelves were laden with delicate ferns, with cacti and gorgeous exotics in full bloom, though the season was in the last days of autumn, and over all drooped, almost from the roof to the ground, the far-stretching and slender green sprays of a graceful acacia. Under this stood Sybil, clad in a simple white dress, decorated by trimmings of rose-coloured satin ribbon, and having a dainty little lace collar round her slender neck; and Trevelyan watched her in silence and with admiration for half a minute ere he entered.

It was the freshness and girlish purity of Sybil that charmed him quite as much as the delicacy of her beauty. During his few years of military life, in London, at Bath, Brighton, and Canterbury, even at Calcutta, he had met many such girls as the Trecarrels—brilliant in flirtation and knowing in all manner of arts and graces; but none that resembled Sybil.

She had plucked a dwarf rose, and was about to place it in the breast of her dress. Suddenly she seemed to pause and change her intention; for a bright and fond smile spread over her soft little face, and while speaking to herself, leaf by leaf, she began to pluck the flower slowly to pieces.

She spoke aloud, but her voice was so low that it failed to reach the ears of Trevelyan, till after a time, when as the leaves lessened in number, she began to raise her tones, and her occupation became plain to him. She was acting to herself—repeating the little part of Goethe's Marguerite in the garden, but in a fashion of her own.

“He loves me a little—tenderly—truly—he loves me not!”

With each pause in this floral formula, the old German mode of divination in love affairs, a pink leaf floated away or fell on her white dress; and when but seven remained round the calyx, she paused for a moment; her face brightened as the charm seemed to work satisfactorily; she resumed her plucking, and as the seventh or last leaf was twitched from the stem, she clasped her hands and exclaimed with joy—

“Truly—Audley loves me *truly!*”

Her colour deepened, and there was almost a divine expression about her eyes and lips ; but she became covered with intense confusion when Trevelyan approached her suddenly, and said with a tender and pleasantly modulated voice—

“ Your floral spell has worked to admiration, for Audley does love you truly and fondly, dearest Sybil !”

“ Oh, Mr. Trevelyan—and you have overheard my folly !” was all she could falter out, as he captured her hands in his own, and she stooped her face aside.

“ *Mr. Trevelyan ?* Why, a moment ago you called me plain Audley, and it did sound so delightful ! Pray do not let us go back in our relations. And you have quite recovered, I hope, from the effects of that frightful affair ?” he added, while smiling with fondness into the clear bright eyes that drooped beneath his gaze.

“ It seems as nothing, now—save when I dream ; you make too much of it—indeed you do,” blundered Sybil.

“ Can I do so of aught in which you have a part ?”

“ Poor mamma is still in a weak and nervous state ; so, I am sorry to say, she will be unable to see you.”

As it was not “mamma” he had come exactly to visit, Audley could only murmur some well-bred expression of regret.

“ How very remarkable that *you* should have been there to save me !” said Sybil, after a pause.

“ The coldly treated stranger by the moorland tarn, eh ?”

“ You forget that we had not been introduced,—how came it all to pass ?” she asked, with growing confusion.

“ As all things in this life do, dearest Sybil.”

“ But how ?”

“ It was fate—destiny.”

“ What—are you a fatalist ?”

“ I hope not ; and yet it were sweet to think that—that——”

“ What ?” murmured Sybil, her long lashes drooping beneath the ardour of his glance, while his clasp seemed to tighten on her slender fingers.

Much more passed that has been said, over and over again, under the same circumstances, by every pair of lovers since roses grew in Eden (and, unluckily, apples too); and there were long pauses, that were only pauses of the tongue, and which beatings of the heart filled up, with many a sigh “ the deeper for suppression.” There grew between these two a sudden sense of great trust which increased the tenderness of their sentiments, while deep gratitude was mingled now with Sybil’s former budding love. It did seem to her, as if Fate had deliberately cast each in the path of the other ; and doubtless it was so, for “ out

of these chance-affinities grow sometimes the passion of a life, and sometimes the disappointments that embitter existence."

"Oh, Audley, without mamma's consent, dare I accept so lovely a ring?" said Sybil, in a low voice, as she lingered at the conservatory door and contemplated a jewel which Trevelyan had just slipped upon her engaged finger.

"You will surely wear it for my sake, till—till—" he paused, and scarcely knew what to say, for he now began to reflect that he was only a subaltern, and had been "going the pace," in his love-making, with a vengeance! To fall in love and engage oneself were easy enough; but, as yet, he did not quite see the end of the affair. Sybil was, moreover, the daughter of an officer whose temper, perhaps, might not brook trifling.

"Oh, it is an exquisite diamond!" resumed the girl, the pause unnoticed, and its cause, to her, unknown.

"It formed one of the eyes of Vishnu, a Hindoo idol, in a temple near Agra. One of the Cornish Light Infantry—old Mike Treherne, the miner's son—poked out both with his bayonet. Jack Delamere bought one; I the other, and had it set thus in a ring by a Parsee jeweller in the Chandney Choke, at a time when I little thought of having in mine so dear a hand to place it on. Has not our acquaintance ripened with wonderful rapidity, darling?"

"Under such terrible circumstances, I don't wonder at it," said she, smiling tenderly as she toyed with the ring, which was now enhanced in value—priceless in her eyes, for it was a love-token.

A love-token! and what might be its future history, and what their fate? "Customs alter, and fashions change," says a writer; "but love-gifts never grow old-fashioned or out of date,—they are always fresh from the golden age. Old people die, and desks and drawers are ransacked by their heirs. Oh, take up tenderly the withered petals, the lock of hair, the quaint ring hidden away in some secret recess; for hearts have once thrilled and eyes moistened at their touch. Precious gems and rare objects there may be in casket and cabinet; but none preserved with such jealous care as *these*, for they were the gifts of love."

Sybil was a thoughtful girl, and even in that happy hour a sadness stole through her heart, as some such ideas occurred to her; but the young officer thought only of the present time, of its joy and of her beauty.

He pressed her to name a day when she and her mamma, as by courtesy bound, would return the visit of the Trecarrels; but, ere that could be accomplished, there came to pass that "greater sorrow" which the heart of Constance had foreboded, and which

must be duly recorded in its place ; so the hoped-for visit was never paid.

On this evening, Audley lingered long with Sybil. Each had so much to say to the other, and so many questions to ask, and so many fond plans for the future, that parting was a difficult task, even with the knowledge that they were to meet again on the morrow.

It came ; and noon saw him again at the villa, where he was received in the drawing-room by Constance *alone* ; and to her he began to speak of Sybil after a time, and to express his admiration and regard for her.

This Constance had fully foreseen and expected ; but she was outwardly, to all appearance, collected and calm, till the *secret* that oppressed her became too much for her nervous system. Then, the tenor of her bearing, which before had been all kindness and gratitude, suddenly changed. She became cold and constrained, perplexed and even awkward ; so that a chill fell upon the heart of Audley, whose nature, all unlike that of his father, was frank and generous to a fault. She curtly but gently told him, that until the return of her husband she could afford no permission for her daughter to receive addresses ; and soon after, full of deep mortification, and dreading he knew not what, Audley Trevelyan took his leave ; and Constance, as she watched his figure pass out of the avenue, burst into tears.

Sybil, as her youngest-born, she had ever looked upon as a species of child—called “*the baby*,” when long past babyhood ; and now Sybil had a lover ! Awakened to the reality of this, the poor lonely mother regarded this new phase of her daughter’s existence with a species of alarm that bordered on terror.

“Would that Richard were home !” was her first thought ; “even Denzil’s advice would be something to me now, poor boy !”

Audley had barely entered the Trecarrels’ drawing-room, when Rose, who was reclining on a fauteuil, with her rich brown hair beautifully dressed by the hands of her Ayah, and who fancied herself immersed in a novel, tossed it aside, for her clear hazel eyes speedily detected the disturbed expression of his face, and proceeded forthwith to quiz him as usual about “the Devereaux girl,” and his intentions in that quarter ; while Mabel, who was seated at the piano, sang laughingly a verse of “Wanted, a Wife,” then a popular song, altering certain words “to suit the occasion,” as Rose said—

“As to fortune—of course, I have but my pay,
A sub with seven-and-sixpence a day,
And a pension beside—rather small, ‘tis confess,
For a leg shot away in the action ‘off Brest ;’

For the loss of three fingers in fighting a chase,
 And a terrible cut from a sword in my face.
 But with all these defects, my nerves I must string,
 To propose for Miss Devereaux—delicate thing!"

Audley felt almost inclined to quarrel with his fair friends.

"Don't tease a fellow so, Rose," said he, wearily; "I have no money—at least, little beyond my pay; and have as much idea of marrying as—as—"

"I have, perhaps."

"I cannot say that."

"You could ask this Sybil Devereaux?"

"Of course—it would be easy as cribbage."

"And what would she say, think you?"

"As a sensible girl such as she seems to be—'wait.'"

"Which means, that she would take you in time to come?"

"Perhaps."

"Unless something better turned up."

"Don't judge of her by yourself, Rose," he retorted, laughing, to conceal his annoyance, which was greatly increased when the General's butler, just as Audley was ascending to his own room to dress for dinner, handed him a letter on a silver salver.

It was from his father; written in his usual clear and precise hand. Audley for a time left it on the toilet table; then he tore it open, with an air of irritation, as these paternal missives were rarely pleasant ones, being always filled with advice, varied by reprehension.

"Fathers have flinty hearts—and, by Jove, here is one!" muttered Audley, while his brows contracted.

"I have seen in the public prints," ran the letter, "all about your adventure with the daughter of those strange people who live at Porthellick. The woman Devereaux is, as her name imports, too probably some designing French adventuress. Mabel Trecarrel has written to your sister Gartha, that you are quite smitten with the daughter; but I give you my distinct advice and notice to take heed of what you are about, and to join us in London without delay. You left the Hussars, even in India, because of the expense of the corps, neither tentage nor loot" (loot! the governor means batta) "being sufficient to maintain you. Disobey me in the matter of this girl Devereaux, and *I shall cut off* even the slender allowance I promised you, for the Cornish Light Infantry."

Audley crushed up the letter in his hand, for it came, at that particular moment, like a sentence of death.

And Downie Trevelyan could write thus of the loving and amiable little family circle at the villa, knowing all he did, and suspecting more!

To fear, or to find that his brother Richard, so long deemed an eccentric bachelor, had a family ready made and at hand to succeed him in the honours of Rhoscadzhel and Lamorna was bad enough. These interlopers who came between his own family and the line of Trevelyan might (perhaps) be set aside ; but to find that his eldest son had become entangled with one of those so-called Devereaux, proved too much for the equanimity of the far-seeing lawyer.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREATER SORROW.

AT the very time when Mabel Trecarrel was singing to tease Audley, Sybil was beginning a song of a very different character and calibre to soothe or amuse her mamma. It was a grand old Hungarian ballad, with an accompaniment like a crash of trumpets at times ; and was one she had picked up during their wanderings on the banks of the Danube ; but she had only got the length of the first two verses, when her mother's tears arrested her.

" Was it the vine with clusters bright
That clung round Buda's stateliest tower?
No, 'twas a lady fair and white,
Who hung around an armed knight ;
It was their sad, their parting hour.

" They had been wedded in their youth,
Together they had spent life's bloom ;
That hearts so long entwined by truth
Asunder should be torn in ruth—
It was a cruel and boding doom !"

" Oh cease, Sybil," said Constance ; " cease ; it was your papa's favourite."

" Then why cease, mamma ?"

" He is not here, and I feel I know not what—a foreboding—a superstition of the heart."

So Sybil closed her piano, and it was long, long ere she opened it again.

Three weeks had now elapsed since the Montreal steamer *Admiral* (his anticipated departure by which Richard Trevelyan fully notified to Constance) had been due at Blackwall, and yet there were no tidings of her, so insurances went up, and underwriters looked grave. No Atlantic cables had been laid as yet between Britain and America, though such things were talked of

as being barely possible. The *next* steamer announced that the *Admiral* had duly sailed at her stated time ; so, save the letter which contained the pleasant odds and ends concerning Montreal and their early lover days, poor Constance saw her husband's writing no more.

Her surmises were endless, and the worthy rector lent his inventive aid to add to them. Might not the ship have met with some accident to her engines, and put back slowly under canvas to Montreal, the Azores, or elsewhere?

Lost—was the word that hovered on her lips and trembled in her heart—LOST ! Oh, that was not to be thought of. Yet if it were so, some must have survived to tell the terrible story ; some might have been picked up, famished and weary, by a passing ship, and taken perhaps to a distant region, Heaven alone knew where. Such events happened every day on the mighty world of waters ; so as week succeeded week, the familiarity with suspense, sorrow and horror seemed to become greater ; till ideas began to confirm themselves, and probabilities to be steadily faced, that she would have shrunk from in utter woe but a month before !

Then came those cruel and shadowy rumours, by which the public are usually tantalised, and the relatives of the missing are tortured—stories of wrecks passed, steamers abandoned—the masts gone, funnel standing, and so forth, in this, that or the other latitude ; but all vague and never verified. How many stately ships have perished at sea, of which such stories have been told ! In those days, it was the *President*, the great, “the lost Atlantic steamer,” on the fate of which at least one novel and several dramas and songs have been written ; and but lately it was the turret ship *Captain*, with her five hundred picked British seamen, that went down into the deep, a few loose spars alone remaining to tell of their sorrowful fate.

Constance and her daughter were inspired by successive hope that he might have survived, and fear that he had perished—too surely perished ; and these alternations were agony, for “the promises of Hope are sweeter than roses in the bud, and far more flattering to expectation ; but the threatenings of Fear are a terror to the heart.”

At last there came a fatal day, when a passage cut from a London newspaper was enclosed to Constance by Audley Trevelyan, who had been constrained to visit and remain in town with his family.

It contained distinct details of the total wreck of the *Admiral*, which had foundered in a gale. She had been heavily pooped by successive seas, and had gone down with all on board, save the watch on deck, who had effected their escape in one of the

quarter-boats, and been picked up in a most exhausted state by one of Her Majesty's ships. All the passengers had been drowned in their cabins, and to this account a list of their names was appended.

"It is very remarkable, my dear madam," wrote the unconscious Audley, "that I do not find the name of Captain Deveaux borne in this list; though we have all the sorrow to see that of my uncle Richard, Lord Lamorna, whose American trip has been to us all a source of mystery."

Constance read the printed list with staring stony eyes, and a heart that stood still!

Mr. Downie Trevelyan had perused it carefully too, with the aid of his gold double eye-glass, and an unfathomable smile had spread over his sleek legal visage while he did so.

"Oh, my husband—my Richard—so innocent and true! Gone—gone, and your children and I are left—doomed to shame and sorrow—doomed—doomed!" wailed Constance in a piercing voice, as, with her fingers interlaced across her face, she cast herself upon a sofa in despair.

"Mamma," urged the terrified Sybil, "what *do* you mean? Does not dear Audley write that papa's name is *not* in the list; so he cannot have sailed in that unhappy ship."

"My poor child, you know not what you say," moaned Constance, without looking or altering her position, for dark and bitter was the desolation of the heart which fell on her.

In vain did poor Sybil caress and hang over her in utter bewilderment, and read and re-read Audley's letter without being able to comprehend the agitation of her mother, who answered nothing. For the time she was overwhelmed by the immensity of their calamity—by gloom and speechless sorrow.

But one thought was ever present—there was a face she should never more behold—a voice she never more should hear; the great ship going down in the dark; "the passengers drowned in their cabins" by the furious midnight sea; and he who loved her so well, who had crossed the Atlantic to bring back the full and legal proofs of their nuptials, was now in the shadowy land—the Promised Land—where there are neither marriages nor giving in marriage; and where there can be no graves either in the soil or in the sea.

With this calamity must many others come!

Richard's means died with him; the proofs of her marriage, and of her children's position, had perished with him too. Even the newspapers, in their notices of the event, were careful to record that "as Lord Lamorna (who had so lately succeeded to that ancient title) died a bachelor, he would be heired by his brother, the eminent barrister, Mr. Downie Trevelyan, now

twelfth Lord Lamorna of Rhoscadzel, in the duchy of Cornwall."

There was the usual obituary notice in a popular illustrated paper, with a wood-cut of the late lord's arms, the demi-horse *argent* issuing from the sea, the coronet, the wild cat, and the motto *Le jour viendra*.

Even Derrick Braddon's name was recorded as among the list of the drowned; so the sole surviving witness of the hasty and secret marriage had perished with his master.

Sybil had answered Audley's letter—Constance was quite incapable of doing so—urging him piteously, for the love he bore her, to make what other inquiries he could at Lloyd's, the shipping offices, and elsewhere, as her mamma seemed to be distracted; and promptly a reply came, but not in Audley's hand-writing, though it bore the London post-mark. It was addressed to her mamma, who, in a weak and breathless voice, desired her to read it; and great were the terror and perplexity of the girl when she perused the following sentence—for one contained the whole matter:—

"Chambers, Temple."

"MADAM,—A letter written by your daughter, and bearing the Porthellick postmark, has just fallen into my hands; so I hereby beg to intimate to you that my eldest son and heir, the Hon. Mr. Audley Trevelyan, can hold no such intercourse as that document would seem to import, or be on such terms of intimacy with a young woman who is destitute of position, who has not a shilling in the world, and whose parentage, family, and so forth—you cannot fail to understand me—are matters of such extreme uncertainty, not to say worse; thus you must endeavour to control her actions, as I shall those of my son, who goes at once to join his regiment in India.

"I am, yours, &c.,

"A copy kept."

"LAMORNA."

"How dare this Lord Lamorna write to you thus, mamma?" asked Sybil, her dark eyes flashing with unusual light; but the pale mother answered only with her tears, and recalling now certain broken sentences which had escaped her—sentences that seemed somewhat to correspond painfully with the insulting tenor of the letter. Sybil, after the first hours of excessive grief were past, said in a composed voice, yet with tremulous lips—

"What does Lord Lamorna mean? *Who* are we, mamma? and what are we?"

Constance was silent, though each pulsation of her heart was a veritable pang.

"Are we not Devereaux?"

"No."

"Who then?" urged Sybil, her pallor increasing, while the silence or pause that ensued was painful to both ; to none more than the innocent mother, the guarded secret of whose blameless life was now about to be laid bare before her own child—a secret that seemed now to assume the magnitude of a crime ! All the care, doubt, anxiety, and mystery of the past years had gone for nothing, and the sacrifice she had made of herself was now likely to recoil fearfully upon her, and, more than all, upon her children.

In broken accents, with her aching head reclined on Sybil's breast, she told all that the reader already knows ; the insane pride of birth and family which inspired the old lord, his suspicions and threats, the long necessity for consequent secrecy ; and Sybil heard all this strange story with intense bewilderment.

Could she realise it—take it all into her comprehension ? Her mother was a lady of title, her brother Denzil was the real Lord Lamorna, she herself was not a Devereaux, but a Trevelyan like Audley, and he—Audley, who loved her so—was her own cousin !

This revelation then explained all to Sybil ; all of their wanderings in strange places, and sudden departures from them, when unwelcome tourists who might have recognised Richard Trevelyan came ; their secluded life at Porthellick, their marked avoidance of the Trecarrels and others ; and on the whole poor Sybil felt cut to the heart, and inspired by not an atom of pride ; yet she tenderly and fondly embraced her mother with greater fervour than ever, for more than ever did she feel that she must love her now.

"My poor papa drowned—drowned, unburied in the sea—passing away from us without even the name by which we have known and loved him !" exclaimed Sybil. "Oh, why is God so cruel to us ?"

"Alas, Sybil, we can but adore the decrees of Heaven, without eking to know more of them. This stroke is hard to bear, child ; all the harder that I have reason to fear—to dread, oh my God, that more than your papa's life has perished with him."

"More, mamma ; what can be more ?"

"That which was dearer to him than life—the succession of Denzil, the honour of us all !"

After a long pause, with a vague expression in her eyes, as if her thoughts were travelling back into the years of the past, Sybil said—

"I had begun to suspect that there was some unpleasant mystery about us."

"But affection and delicacy—"

"Both, dearest mamma, sealed my lips, and I was silent ; but

oh, to what good end or purpose has it all been? By this, too surely, is Audley also lost to me."

" My poor child, he was your lover, and through me you think you lose him. Oh, pardon me, Sybil darling, for I, your hapless mother, am the cause of all this! Had your papa never seen, or known, or loved me——"

" Do not say so, mamma dear," whispered Sybil, as her mother's tremulous lips were pressed on her throbbing brow.

" It was a plan your papa formed to save his inheritance for you and Denzil, and already his brother claims all."

" It was a false plan, and see how it may fail us—nay already, to all appearance, has failed us."

" He is in his grave—if, indeed, the ocean can be called a grave."

" True—my darling papa; and I must not upbraid him, even in thought."

" If it is the will of God that I should suffer, His will be done! But my children—my children!" cried the widow wildly, and she raised her hands and her dark and beautiful but bloodshot eyes to Heaven; " my brave and handsome Denzil, and my soft sweet Sybil—of what have they been guilty, that shame and ruin should fall on them?"

" Mamina," whispered Sybil, embracing her closely, " we must learn to bear with resignation the woes we cannot help. But oh," added the girl in her heart, " how am I to write to Denzil of all this sorrow, and probably worse than sorrow and poverty?"



CHAPTER XX.

A FAMILY GROUP.

AND so he was gone—this tender husband, who had loved her so dearly, and whose secret she had shared so unavailingly for years; and apart from the horror of the doubt that hung over the future of her children, whose means and honour, like her own, had too probably perished with him, a despair grew in the heart of Constance when she surveyed the familiar objects, the little household gods of their once happy home, and thought upon the days that could never, never come again.

There were times when she could not believe that she had lost him; that her sorrow was a painful dream from which she must awake. She perpetually found herself softly whispering his name, especially in the waking hours of the night. Thus too from overtension of the nervous system, she would start at the

fancied sound of her own name, uttered as if by his voice at a vast distance.

In the delicacy and tenderness of Constance, there was an amount of keenness and intensity possessed by few, and thus her heart bled for her daughter, rather than for her own dubious position, the fact of which had been so coarsely thrust upon her by the insolent letter of Downie Trevelyan, who was now formly spoken of and everywhere announced and received as "Lord Lamorna."

That Sybil had given all the wealth of her young heart to this man's son, was but too evident to her anxious mother's observation ; but how would matters tend now, and could that misplaced love have a successful termination ?

Days were passing in sorrow now ; no letters from Audley came to either. Sybil looked delicate and grew pale and thin, for a double grief was consuming her, and Constance began to marvel in her heart, was she meant to live in suffering and penury, perhaps to die early, this child—her dead father's idol, so loved and petted by him.

Sybil felt secretly pleased with the idea that there existed between her and Audley a tie—the tie of blood—which even the antagonism of his crafty father could not break. "The idea of cousinly intimacy to girls is undoubtedly pleasant," says Anthony Trollope ; "and I do not know whether it is not the fact, that the better and the purer the girl, the sweeter and the pleasanter is the idea."

How often had Constance asked of herself—but never of him who was gone—"How long is this deception to be carried on ? How long am I to wait before I take my place in the world as the wife of Richard Trevelyan, and cease to figure as a sham Devereaux, and how long are our children to be thus under a cloud ?" All obstacles were removed now, but the sham was becoming a reality, and the cloud was growing darker than ever.

And was her poor Denzil, then so far away from her, to be tamely robbed of his noble inheritance after all ?

The necessity for action in some way, even before acquainting him with his father's death and real rank, compelled Constance to bestir herself. She knew no one whom she felt tempted to consult with confidence, and was totally ignorant of the line of action to adopt, but on hearing, before a week had passed, that the whole family of the Trevelyanys had come from town and taken up their residence at Rhoscadzhel, she resolved to lose no time in confronting the usurper personally, attended only by her daughter. She could—she feared not—fully prove the identity of "Captain Devereaux" with Captain Trevelyan the late lord,

and her husband's miniature, which she wore, and his letters, especially the last from Montreal, would prove still further the fact of her marriage, and his intentions as regarded his will, though they were all addressed to her as Mrs. Devereaux, and simply bore his signature as "Richard," save one already mentioned, to which he appended his title.

So she thought and flattered herself while, clad in the deepest mourning, she and Sybil traversed, by the Cornwall Railway, the forty odd miles that lay between Porthellick and Rhoscadzhel, followed by the prayers and blessings of old Winnie Braddon.

"That which we fancy must break our hearts, we can bear patiently, and what is more, so learn to conform to, that after a few years of life, we can wonder that we thought them hardships," says a writer with much truth. So did Constance think her heart would break, when all the reality of her desolate condition was brought home to her, by her mirror reflecting her face—the face that Richard loved so well—encircled by a widow's cap—that odious ruche of tulle; but she already felt the conviction strongly, that whatever happened now, she would not have many years of life before her.

Mother and daughter sat silent and sad while the train swept on, Lostwithiel with its antique octagon spire and the ruins of Restormal, with their moat full of sweet-briars; St. Blazey, to whose shrine the woolcombers made their pilgrimages in the days of old (the saint having been tortured or curried to death with wool-combs, by the Cornish men who declined to be converted from Druidism), with many a spacious lawn and bare autumnal wood and many a purple moor, were speedily left behind; and now it was past Grampound with its market-house and ancient granite cross, the train went screaming and clanking. Redruth next, in a dreary and barren district whose wealth lies far below the soil, which is literally honeycombed by the shafts and levels of mines; and then came Hayle, the houses of which are all built of scoria or slag, the débris of ancient mines; and then the travellers hired at the "White Hart," a carriage for Rhoscadzhel.

To Constance, the scenery there had its chief interest in the circumstance that in youth and manhood her husband must have been familiar with every feature of it, and must have shot and hunted over it all. Noon was past now; but the sun shed a rich golden light upon a calm sea, of which they had lovely glimpses at times between the grey granite *carns* and clumps of oak and elm. Sometimes the carriage rolled past wildernesses of rock and morass, where wild tarns reflected in their glassy depths the blue sky above, and where valleys opened westward to the

Bristol Channel, whose waves were buttressed out by precipices of bold and striking outline ; and the heart of Constance began to beat painfully as each revolution of the wheels drew her nearer and nearer to the house, that long ere this should have been her home.

She felt, or thought, that now she was about to face, confront, and grapple with her fate, and to know the best or worst ! The secret burden so long intolerable, would now be cast aside, and the adoption of any line of action, in lieu of the existence she had led since her loss was confirmed—the dumb mechanical life of one too paralysed even to think—was a relief. Yet moments there were when she half repented of her journey.

Her husband, her sole protector, was gone, and the proofs of their marriage, and of his intentions by will, too, were gone also ! If her arguments were repelled, her assertions denied, what must be her fate, and how terribly should she and those he loved so well be exposed to the sneers and heartlessness of a world that knew nothing of their good qualities, or of the cause for that concealment which might now prove the cause of their destruction.

What if even now, at the eleventh hour, as it were, she turned prudently back, and concealed the fact that she was the true Lady Lamorna—that her son was a peer of the realm—and let him and Sybil pass through life as humble Devereaux, content to earn their bread as best they could ? But to see Downie Trevyelan, the author of that harsh and most insulting letter, occupying the place of her Denzil—no—no a thousand times no !

Some such fears had been occurring to Sybil, who now said, in a low voice, as they drew near the stately gate of Rhoscadzhel,

“ I doubt, dearest mamma, whether this is a wise proceeding on our part ; if we have the legal right to call ourselves Trevelyans, that right should be placed for proof in legal hands.”

“ If we have—” began Constance, impetuously, and then became silent, for she felt that the views of her daughter were, perhaps, the most correct.

The elaborate iron gate, and its tall granite pillars, each supporting a grotesque Koithgath, surmounted by a coronet, were left behind, and they proceeded along the stately avenue by which we have so lately seen Richard passing as chief mourner at the funeral of the old lord ; and now, as the porte-cochere (which bore a double hatchment) was approached, came a new perplexity to the mind of Constance. How was she to announce herself ?

As “Lady Lamorna,” where there was already one who called herself so ; simply as “Mrs. Devereaux,” or as “a lady wishing

an interview with Lord Lamorna?" But from the utterance of his name in this instance she shrunk.

The pampered servants, on seeing that the approaching vehicle was only a carriage hired from the neighbouring inn, and not an equipage having coats of arms and showy liveries, were somewhat slow in answering the summons at the bell; but as the hall door stood open, and, luckily for the perplexed Constance, Mr. Jasper Funnel, the solemn, portly, and intensely respectable-looking butler, was lingering there, she asked if she could "see his master."

Now this was a mode to which Mr. Jasper Funnel was all unused, and he might have been disposed to summon "Jeames" or "Chawles" to attend to her; but there was now a hauteur in the bearing of Constance that thoroughly bewildered, if it failed to awe him.

"Master, mum?" he stammered; "his lordship is at home, but engaged with General Trecarrel—I can take in your card, however."

"I have not my card-case with me."

"What name, then?"

"It matters not—just say——"

"Perhaps, mum, relations of the family?" suggested Funnel, perceiving the depth of mourning worn by the two ladies.

"Yes—near relations, indeed," replied Constance, restraining her tears with difficulty.

The man of bins and vintages, who thought he knew the branches of the Trevelyan family through all their ramifications, looked still more perplexed; however, he said, with a still lower bow,

"This way, mum—please to follow me," and desiring their driver to await them, Constance and Sybil entered the mansion of Rhoscadzhel.

As if to tantalise them by a display of all they were perhaps to lose, or had already lost for ever, a valet, to whose care Mr. Funnel now consigned them, conducted them by a somewhat circuitous route, as all the suites of rooms were not in order, the family having arrived unexpectedly from town.

Passing through the marble vestibule, an arch on one side of which opened to a gay aviary, and one on the other to the beautiful conservatory, they entered a long and lofty corridor, where the soft carpet muffled every foot-fall, and where were the objects of *vertu*, accumulated by several generations of Trevelyan; a veritable museum it seemed, of glass cases filled with quaintly illuminated vellum MSS., in fine old Roman bindings, red-edged and clasped; old laces of Malines and Bruges; Chinese ivory carvings, delicate as gossamer webs; Burmese idols; Japanese

cabinets, covered with flaming dragons ; Majolica vases, where rosy cupids, grotesque tritons, nude nymphs, and shining dolphins, were all grouped together ; Delft hardware of odd designs; Etruscan cups, cream-coloured or crimson, with slender black demoniac figures thereon ; mediæval suits of armour ; family portraits of dames in ruffs and farthingales, and of past Trevelyanians, all well-wigged, cuirassed, and armed : some with Bardolph noses and paunches of comely curve, suggestive of sack and venison ; the chiefs of these being Lord Henry, who was Governor of Rougemont Castle for Queen Elizabeth, and Launcelot, the cavalier-lord, who sought shelter in Trewoofe from the victorious Roundheads.

The refined and cultivated taste of Constance could well appreciate all these objects ; but now, as one in a dream, her eyes wandered over those walls where many a gem of art was hanging ; the soft-eyed and white-skinned girls of Greuze ; the bearded and doublet nobles of Vandyke ; cattle, fat and lazy-looking, by Cuyp ; hazy sea-pieces by Turner, and more than one lovely Raphael ; but even her every thought was turned inward ; and as if to support herself, she retained Sybil's tremulous little hand, on which her clasp tightened, as the servant, who was clad in mourning livery, with a black cord aiguillette on each shoulder, opened noiselessly the half of a folding-door, and ushered them into that splendid library where her husband had found his proud old uncle dead at the writing-table, and Downie (with the unsigned deed) hanging over him, with confusion and disappointment on his usually stolid visage.

"Visitors, my lord," said the servant.

And to add to the perplexity of Constance, she found herself face to face with the whole family group—the whole, at least, save one, her nephew Audley.



CHAPTER XXI.

HUMILIATION.

THE statements made to Audley Trevelyan by his father as to the dubious position of the two ladies at Porthellick—artful statements which seemed, without collusion, to corroborate so much that Mabel and Rose Trecarrel hinted or openly advanced—had seriously grieved and perplexed him. Thus, while loving Sybil and longing for her society on one hand, with the selfishness or vacillation peculiar to many young men, on the other, he began to wish that he had not gone quite so far—that he had

been less precipitate in his love-making ; but his perplexity increased to utter bewilderment, not unmixed with indignation, when his usually languid mother, with considerable scorn and irritation of manner, informed him that “the person calling herself Mrs. Devereaux” was but an *intriguante*, who had sought to lure his foolish uncle Richard into marriage ; and his father admitted that he and others had long suspected his brother of having some low and illicit entanglement.

Now Audley knew that this “*intriguante*” had a son, whose existence might endanger his own succession to a title.

Was this fair, slender and delicate girl, whose gentle image had wound itself about the heart of Audley, and on whose “engagement finger” he had so recently slipped a ring, actually a cousin ; but one whom he could not acknowledge—a person whom he dared not marry, in dread of that trumpet-tongued bugbear called “Society?”

He had ceased for some days to write to her. In this he accused himself of gross selfishness ; but his father’s open threats of withdrawing every shilling of his allowance, of turning his back upon him for ever, and so forth, if he dared to countenance the Devereaux in any way ; and his total inability to live anywhere on his subaltern’s pay alone, together with the dread of compromising his cold, proud, and intensely aristocratic mother and sister—in fact, it would seem, his whole family too—made him strive to crush in his heart the young love it was so sweet to brood upon ; but Audley strove in vain, and began to think that the sooner he was back to India the better for all.

He had been nervous, irritable, and “out of sorts” since he had returned to Rhoscadzhel, and obtaining a passing glimpse of the little white villa as the train passed it, *en route*, had made him worse. He had procured Champagne and various other vintages too freely from Jasper Funnel ; he had broken the knees of a favourite horse ; ripped up the green cloth of the new billiard table when practising alone, and more than once had angrily laid his whip across the back of unoffending Rajah.

On the afternoon of the visit which closes the preceding chapter, his mother who was seated languidly in a deep easy chair near the library fire, playing with a feather fan, while her daintily slippers little feet rested on a velvet tabourette, said in her soft and monotonous voice,—

“I do wish, Audley, that odious dog of yours was dead—shot or lost.”

“Why, mother, it was poor Jack Delamere’s dying legacy.”

“It is such a shaggy, self-willed, huge and savage animal—always about one’s skirts or in one’s way.”

“You are unusually energetic in your adjectives this evening,

my lady mother," replied Audley ; " poor Rajah is as gentle as a lamb, and I might have found a kind owner for him ere this, however," he added, as he thought sadly of the winning Sybil on whose skirts his splendid pet had been permitted to nestle unrebuked.

"Visitors, mamma!" exclaimed Gartha Trevelyan, a fair-haired and languid edition of her mother, and already, in her sixteenth year, the imitator of all her tones and ways ; "who *can* they be—in a hired carriage, too?"

"Ladies in deep mourning," said General Trecarrel, glancing uneasily at Audley.

"By Jove!" muttered the latter, growing quite pale, as he recognised them from a bay window, and at once quitting the library, descended by a private staircase to where his horse and groom happened to be awaiting him.

"My cousin—he is my own cousin; this was the secret sympathy—the tie of blood that drew us to each other," Sybil was thinking softly, in her timid heart, to keep her courage up, at the very time when he who, without flinching, would have faced a Sikh gun-battery, or a horde of Afghans, was avoiding her, and galloping ingloriously away from what he deemed "a scene—a deuced family row," with a blush on his cheek, shame, pity, and anger mingling in his soul, with the half-formed wish that he had never met and never known her!

Advancing into the room, the mother and daughter bowed, and then stood irresolute. The former had expected to have seen Downie alone; but finding him thus, amid his family, and the General present too, all her pre-arranged and carefully considered explanations and remarks completely fled her memory, and her mind became blank as a sheet of unwritten paper, as Downie, after a rapid whisper to his wife, over whose colourless face there flashed a look of angry scorn, took the initiative.

His wife, with her everlasting smelling-bottle or vinaigrette and lace handkerchief; her newly-cut novel close by; her pale, dull eyes and unmeaning smile; her "company manners;" her soft white hands, smooth and unwrinkled as her forehead, yet cold and puerile as her heart, was always a kind of bore; but now her *tout-ensemble* had all the impress of insipidity, animated by insolence; for weak though the lawyer's wife was in character, she felt that she was mistress of the situation; and at least *pro tem.*, if not for life, Lady Lamorna.

She regarded the widow with a cold and supercilious stare, to which the former replied by a steady gaze, and each seemed to draw her own conclusions of the other in an instant, for "to women alone pertains that marvellous freemasonry, which sees the character at a glance, and investigates the sincerity of a

disposition or the value of a lace flounce with the same practised facility."

Downie, too, had his own peculiar acuteness and instincts, sharp and keen, wherever he went ; he saw everything in a moment ; whoever he met, he read their faces like a book, he marked all their features, deduced their personal characters, just as if he had been intimate with them for a life-time ; and a very useful power this had proved to him, in the course of his legal career ; and now, in his mourning suit, he looked like "one of those great crows that are to be seen, apparently asleep, in a meadow in autumn ; but which, nevertheless, see everything that is going on around them." The gentle aspect, the forlorn bearing, and uncommon beauty of Constance and her daughter, would have softened any other heart than Downie's ; but his was like Cornish granite—the oldest and stoniest of all stones.

General Trecarrel—somewhat nervously it must be owned—shook hands with the intruders, for as such they felt themselves viewed ; but the dog Rajah, alone gave them a welcome by fawning round Sybil, who trembled excessively, and could scarcely restrain her tears, while the dog's recognition of her did not escape the wife of Downie, who drew certain conclusions therefrom.

"Mrs. Devereaux, I believe ?" said Downie Trevlyan, calmly, and with his professional smile, as he looked up from the table, which was literally heaped up with letters, many of them being unopened ; "to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit ?"

"You owe it to my sorrow, sir," replied Constance, gathering courage, as her eye caught a portrait of Richard Trevlyan, in his uniform, painted years ago, ere he went to America, and looking just as she had seen him in the early days of their happy loverhood ; and now the pictured face seemed to smile upon her out of the past ; "to the death of my husband—your brother, as you know, by drowning," she added.

He gave her a stare of cold enquiry, over, and finally, through his double gold eye-glass, which he specially wiped for the occasion, and then turning to his wife, said,—

"Gartha, my dear, take your namesake and the boys with you---retire, please, for we may have much to say that must not be said before you."

"Perhaps I—I too, am *de trop*?" said General Trecarrel, a little nervously, assuming his hat and malacca cane.

"Not at all—pray be seated," replied Downie.

"If—Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Oh, yes ; Mrs. Devereaux will excuse you, General, I am sure," answered Downie, as his wife, with her four younger children, sailed haughtily from the room, drawing in her skirts

as she passed Constance, whose pretty lip only quivered a little with disdain.

To do him justice, the barrister looked on the widow with something of interest, mingling, momentarily, with his fear and anger—but momentarily only. She was slenderly and so beautifully formed, small featured, and dark haired, with much that was intense and unfathomable in her pleading eyes—pleading for her children's honour and her own? and there was Sybil, too, clad in the deepest mourning, her high black dress, with its pretty cuffs, and a small white collar round her delicate neck, made her fair skin seem fairer still, and appeared to become the darkness of her hair and eyes better than any other style of dress would have done; but then, Sybil looked charming in everything!

The little interest died, and Downie regarded them with intense hostility, for he had all “that sublime philosophy which teaches us to bear with tranquillity the woes of others.”

“Oh—ah—yes,” he said, after a most harassing pause; “you are the lady who lives—in fact, who has lived for some time past, in a villa near Porthellick?”

“The same, sir.”

Downie knit his brows, for she accorded him no title, and he was somewhat jealous on the point.

“It was a bold act of my brother to bring you here to Cornwall—a secluded place—almost under the eyes of his own family too!”

“Circumstanced as we were by the eccentricity of his late uncle, it was, perhaps, unwise,” she replied, gently.

“I am glad that you admit so much: a little villa near St. John’s Wood, or some such place, had been more appropriate for persons so situated.”

The eyes of Constance began to flash dangerously.

“My son is Lord Lamorna!” she exclaimed; “and even on his cold-blooded uncle may punish this cruel insult to his mother!”

The General, to whom all this revelation was new and startling, began to feel uncomfortable, and to look quite perplexed; but Downie only smiled a crafty smile, as he said—

“Pooh, my good woman, you are out of your senses; what can be the object of this visit? I am busy—does your carriage wait?”

“Before scandals go forth in our name, I beseech you to consider well, and to read this letter, which will show you who I am and what I am, and why for years we have all borne the name of Devereaux,” said Constance, making a prodigious effort to control her great grief and just indignation, as she held the docu-

ment before Downie ; "it is the last my dear, dear husband wrote me."

"Husband—absurd ! This is the wildest of wild assertions," said Downie Trevelyan, as he took the letter from her hand, nevertheless ; and as he did so, the words of her dead husband came back to her memory, when he said "that proofs of their marriage, beyond mere *assertion*, must be forthcoming ;" and now those proofs were buried in the sea.

"You must recognise the handwriting," said Constance, in a tremulous tone ; "and oh, sir," she added, as she eyed him doubtfully and wistfully, "you will restore it to me, and not destroy it ?"

"Destroy !" said he, sternly ; "what are you talking about ? I hope I am too much of a lawyer to destroy any document."

"Before witnesses, at least," was the awkward addendum of the General.

Downie's legal eye quickly took in the situation, as detailed by his brother Richard in that letter, which stated that the little chapel of St. Mary, at Montreal, had been burned down three years after the regiment had left the city ; that the Père Latour and the acolyte were both dead ; that though the Registers had all perished in the flames, the signed copy of the marriage certificate was preserved by Latour's successor, and "*is now in my possession*," added the letter, the signature to which, "Lamorna," made the reader's eyes to gleam with secret rage ; but he merely said,

"Suppose this letter were written by my brother—a supposition of which I do not admit the truth—who are 'those at home' whom he doubts ?"

"You, most probably," said the General, with soldierly candour.

"Absurd, my dear sir," replied Downie, tossing the letter contemptuously to Constance. "This is a fabrication, written to suit the occasion : the church burned ; the Register destroyed ; the witnesses dead, too ! It is a strange story, and strange chapter of accidents. You lived with him long enough, I doubt not, madam, to learn how to feign my brother's handwriting. This document has not even an envelope—so where are the postal marks ?"

"I lost it——"

"Bah ! I thought so."

There was a peculiar basilisk flicker in the pale eyes of Downie Trevelyan, and he surveyed the shrinking widow of his brother pitilessly, with a glance of hate—a glance beyond all the eloquence of fury or wrath, for he felt in his heart—or what passed for such—that she spoke *truth* in all this matter, but a truth she would have difficulty in proving.

"Oh mamma—mamma, let us go," implored Sybil.

"And this Dick Braddon who accompanied my brother—the other witness—a worthless old Chelsea pensioner, and so he too is gone?"

"Gone with my husband," replied Constance, clasping her hands and looking upward.

"As my poor brother never yet, to my knowledge at least, prior to his luckless American tour, appended his name to any document as *Lamorna*, we have no means of testing or comparing the signature to your production, were such test necessary—which it is not."

Gathering courage, Constance was about to make some proud response, when Downie, in his (external) character pure and unspotted as his shirt front, said while turning to the General—

"My brother Richard picked up, of course, some of those dissipated habits which are peculiar to the army, and—"

"Oh, pardon me, my lord," began the General, in a deprecatory tone, while inserting his right hand in the breast of his closely buttoned surtout.

"It is true, Trecarrel; you redcoats are a sad set, and here we see the result of an unlucky *liaison*."

"Richard—Richard," wailed Constance, "how hard is all this to bear?"

"Yes, madam," said Downie; "but 'the way of transgressors is always hard.'"

"Transgressors, sir?"

"Against the laws of morality and society, madam. Do not misunderstand me, madam?"

"Oh no—oh no," replied Constance, in a choking voice; "I quite understand you."

The General was deeply moved; he advanced a pace or two towards her, and lifted his hand with an air of entreaty; but Downie was pitiless, and added—

"Yes, madam, and not content with seeking to entrap my brother, there has actually been an attempt made, too, to entrap and delude my son!"

"Sir," said Constance, moving towards the door of the library, I came in hope—I must own, half-desperate hope—of having an explanation from, or a compromise with you—perhaps a recognition of our just claims. Assertion, even backed by such a letter as this, is, I must own, but slender evidence; so a court of law shall prove the rest."

"As you please, madam," replied Downie, rising and ringing a hand-bell deliberately. "Show this—*lady* out. So much for Mrs. Devereaux!" he added furiously, for he was greatly disturbed and ruffled,

A mist seemed before the eyes of both mother and daughter, as they quitted the stately room mechanically, to seek their vehicle at the porte-cochère. Constance kept her proud little head erect, however, so long as she was under observation ; for though her heart was wrung with agony as she thought of her children, there was something of a Spartan matron in the outward bearing she affected, and in her perfect power of self-mastery then.

Stared at in the corridor by the wondering and mocking eyes of all the younger children of Downie, who had taken their cue from the manner in which their mamma had gathered her skirts in the library, as if to avoid pollution ; stared at too in the vestibule and portal by Mr. Funnel the solemn butler, by Boxer the rubicund coachman, and by a group of whiskered valets, who all saw that something, they knew not what, "was hup," they reached the hired carriage that was to take them back to Hayle ; and Jeames in powder, wearing "the uniform" of the noble family, remarked to Chawles, a brother of the plush and shoulder-knot, quite audibly, that "they both seemed the lady, quite ; but he feared they was only a couple of guv'nesses or companions out of place—a lot as miserable as curates and tutors, and all that sort o' thing."

Constance shivered as if with ague when she drew up the glasses of the carriage, and they took their departure from Rhoscadzhel.

Open war alone could save or sink them now !



CHAPTER XXII.

"MRS. GRUNDY."

GENERAL TRECARREL, who was an amiable and well-disposed man, felt the utmost regret in having been present at an interview so painful, unseemly, and perplexing. Notwithstanding the calmness, dignity, and confidence with which Constance asserted her claims to wifehood and nobility, he had his secret doubts—which Downie had *not*—as to the legality of the ties that had subsisted between her and his late friend, Richard Trevelyan. Yet he could not but think of her kindly, humanely, and with interest ; she seemed so perfectly ladylike, was so gentle and so beautiful.

In short, the old soldier, little given to study character or matters not military, felt sorely bewildered by the strange story

so suddenly unfolded by his fair neighbour, and withdrew to think over it and to dress for dinner.

“So that odious woman and the cunning minx, her daughter, are gone at last?” said Mrs. Downie—the acknowledged Lady Lamorna—entering the carpeted library, softly and noiselessly, in her usual languid and wearied way.

“Yes, Gartha—at last,” replied her husband, who was still seated at the writing-table with his head resting on his left hand, for he was full of thoughts that oppressed him.

“You look disturbed, Downie dear?” she lisped, as she sank into her easy chair and resumed the feather fan or hand screen.

“That idiot Audley has complicated matters by forming an attachment for the woman’s daughter; but Trecarrel, who goes soon to India now, shall take him off there at once.”

“And what was the object of her visit, pray?”

“Oh, she came here to try the favourite Whig scheme—conciliation at any price, no matter how humiliating; and exhibited a letter she had manufactured, as from my brother; but it won’t pass with me—no, no!”

“You are right to repel such attempts as this; and I agree with you that Audley had better relinquish what remains of his leave and quit England,” she replied, yet not without a sigh, for her son had been but a short time at home, and India was so far away. But anything was better than that he should entangle himself with a girl like this—*her* son Audley, when she had almost registered a vow “never to syllable a name unchronicled by Debrett;” the idea was absurd, horrible in the extreme!

“Perhaps, Downie dear,” said she, after a little consideration, “we are too fearful. I have read somewhere that ‘boy and girl cousins never fraternise.’”

“Don’t they, by Jove!” growled Downie; especially when they come to the age of puberty, without having known each other previously. Then the Scots have a proverb about ‘blood being thicker than water,’ though I can’t see it in that way myself. The girl is remarkably handsome, and Audley’s affair with her must have made considerable progress ere her letter came into my possession in London.”

“Handsome? dear, dear! do you really think so? I thought her very saucy in expression, and a positive dowdy, in a dress made, no doubt, by some Penzance milliner,” replied the lady, while contemplating complacently her own magnificent black *moire*, for she did not entertain more charitable opinions respecting the daughter than the mother.

Though more advanced in life than Constance (for she had been married some years before her), the wife of Downie had still considerable remains of beauty, and, despite time and

dimples turning fast to wrinkles, she was bent upon being gay, young, and beautiful still. She had an air that decidedly denoted high breeding, with much of languor and indifference to all that passed around her. She had completely attained that bearing of placidity, utter vacuity or unimpressionability, so sedulously affected or adopted by many among the upper class of English society, and even by their middle-class imitators. However, all the little spirit or energy she ever possessed fired up now, in the conviction that she was the Right Honourable Lady Lamorna, that Audley was one of "England's Honourable Misters," and that Gartha should find a husband among the tufts and strawberry leaves at least.

Downie had not her ambition even in these matters, but had naturally avarice ; and his profession had, of course, taught him trickery ; "Despair of no man," it has been said : "there are touches of kindness in natures the very roughest, that redeem whole lives of harshness ;" but to have sought for charity or kindness at the hands of Downie were a task as easy as taking a bone from a famished tiger.

That day, at the dinner-table, after the ladies had withdrawn, and Downie, the General, and Audley were lingering over their wine (or wines rather), the conversation naturally turned to the recent visit of Constance and her daughter ; and a painful theme it proved to the young officer.

From General Trecarrel he had previously obtained a narrative of all that had passed, and though he thanked Heaven that he had been absent, his heart was preyed upon by many keen and conflicting emotions. He loved Sybil tenderly, he acknowledged to himself ; but could he think of marriage with her, when she was the daughter of a woman in a position as dubious as that of Constance was now openly declared to be—one, moreover, whose claims were so startling, and whose allegations were, as his father called them, so daring as to merit criminal prosecution,—for so had the lawyer said in his wrath and the strength of his own position !

Intense pity for the girl mingled with his passion for her, and added to his great perplexity ; and thus, while his cheek alternately flushed and grew pale, he sat with half-averted face, and the fingers of one hand buried among his thick brown hair, irritated by the conviction that his father's cold, keen, and scrutinising eyes were bent loweringly upon him, while in silence he heard the General bluntly urging him "if he had any tender views in *that* quarter, to get rid of them as soon as possible, and be off to join his regiment ;" for to Trecarrel military service seemed a cure for every human ill.

"But the letter she showed you ?" pled Audley.

“ That letter, sir, I have already denounced as a most daring forgery ! ” replied Downie, with as much energy as his usually quiet manner permitted.

“ Could she—one so eminently like a lady—be guilty of such a crime ? ”

“ Your uncle’s mistress would be, of course, familiar with his handwriting.”

Audley felt his heart vibrate painfully at this injurious but, as the circumstances seemed to stand, not inapplicable term. Compassion and tenderness pleaded for the dove-eyed Sybil ; but policy, society, or the promptings of “ Mrs. Grundy ” urged that he should, nay must, relinquish all thought of her for ever ; so while sitting there, sipping his golden-tinted château yquem, and playing with the embossed grape scissors, to all appearance very calm and quiet, a storm of doubt and shame was struggling in his heart with love ; “ for this passion,” says Lord Bacon, “ hath its floods in the very times of weakness, which are great prosperity and great adversity, both which times kindle love and make it more fervent.” And now Sybil was in an adversity of which he knew not the actual depth.

“ To me it seems that you are somewhat severe in this whole affair, General,” said he, after a pause.

“ God forgive me, if I am so ! ” replied Trecarrel, earnestly.

“ Suppose this girl’s position to be all you advance, if we love because we like and admire each other, are we to be censured ? ”

“ Then who the devil should be censured ? ” said his father, with asperity.

“ Destiny.”

“ Pshaw ! ” said Downie ; “ this is mere romance—mooning ! ”

“ And deuced unlike one of the 14th Hussars,” added Trecarrel.

“ The very rubbish of which dramas are made.”

“ You are right, Downie ; but, till now, I always thought this young fellow of yours was rather fond of my girl Rose.”

Audley coloured deeply, and assisted himself to wine, as he said—

“ I greatly admire both Miss Trecarrel and her sister Miss Rose ; but I have not the honour to stand higher in their favour than that of others.”

“ But this girl Devereaux——” his father was beginning passionately.

“ Excuse me, dear sir,” interrupted Audley, “ if I beg that you will cease to taunt me on this painful subject. The tenor of the letter she wrote to me—the letter which you found on my desk, and which in all fairness you should not have read—a Lieutenant of the Line not being exactly a schoolboy—sufficiently evinced

that we were on terms of affection and intimacy. I knew not then who she was, or who her people were. I had saved her life, as the General knows, at considerable peril, and so there grew up a tender tie between us; but all shall be ended now," he continued in a tone of emotion. "I see that it must be so, sir. I see also the necessity for not compromising your just title to the rank and place you hold by attaching myself in any way to the fortunes of the Devereaux. So I implore you to let the matter cease, or I shall quit the room—yes, even the house itself, so surely as I shall ere long quit England, perhaps never to return!"

"I thank you for this promise, Audley," said Downie emphatically; "and when once with your regiment, you shall find your allowance most amply increased."

"For that I thank you, sir," said Audley, sighing.

"I am richer now than when you were in the Hussars."

"And out of that wealth, Downie—I beg pardon, I mean my Lord Lamorna—I trust you will do something handsome now for poor Dick's widow and orphan?" blundered the General.

"Widow and orphan!" repeated Downie, with growing anger.

"Well, widow in one sense."

"In what sense?"

"A widow of the heart," persisted Trecarrel, reddening to the roots of his grizzled hair. "She and her pretty daughter have suffered a fearful stroke of fortune—and even poverty may not be the most severe trial before them."

"I shall settle a small sum on the mother, perhaps," said Downie, reluctantly; "and get the girl, if you wish it, a situation as companion at a distance from this."

"Companion? That is a kind of upper servant who must wash the spaniel, and feed the parrot," said the General, testily; "supervise the maid who dresses her mistress's hair, read novels aloud, and sermons on Sunday; write invitations, and answer them; pay all bills, and stand all manner of vapours and ill-humours, for thirty pounds per annum and a *quiet home!* Come, come, Downie, d—n it," added Trecarrel, "you might do something more handsome than that for a daughter of Richard Trevelyan."

"Sir," replied the other, becoming slightly ruffled by the old officer's perfect bluntness, "when certain people in this world cannot get white bread and wine, they should content them with brown bread and water; they must also work, if they would not beg. I think that I shall have done enough if I do what I propose for the daughter; and as for the mother, through my humble endeavours, a housekeeper's place or the matronage of a lunatic asylum may be procured for her, if she is in poverty, and if her want of previous character could be tided over with the Board

of Guardians. By her daring claim, she has certainly striven to injure me and all my innocent family,” added Downie loftily ; “yet I do not wish evil to happen to her.”

“Whether we wish it or wish it not, neither will come according to our mere human desire,” retorted the General ; “so pass the Madeira, please, Audley, for here comes Funnel with the coffee—a hint that we are to join the ladies in the drawing-room.”

Downie Trevelyan had always had his secret fears of the family in the villa at Porthellick, and he knew not exactly how strong their claims upon his dead brother might be. However, he had lost no time in having himself fully served heir to the late lord, on the loss of the steamer “Admiral” becoming an ascertained fact ; and, though a lawyer by profession, he now literally loathed the sight of the circulars and letters that poured in upon him on his accession to rank and fortune. There were legal details to be filled up, dry formalities to be gone through with perplexing repetitions and minuteness ; there were entreaties from tradesmen that “his Lordship would not change the family custom,” and applications of a similar nature from town and country agents to retain their agencies, &c., &c. Then there was “the suit of those Devereaux,” as he called a bulky and menacing document which a shabby-looking fellow deposited at Rhoscadzel one morning, with lists of the vexatious papers required for the defence—all the preparation of “some hedge-lawyer—some low legal desperado,” as Downie styled him ; for he now himself felt, in the tone and tenor of these legal letters and documents, the pointed stings he had for years past so pitilessly planted in others.

The legal document had the effect of completing all the silent arguments of Mrs. Grundy in the mind of Audley. But a few days ago, he was so happy in the conviction that he loved Sybil and was beloved again ; and now he saw the necessity for action and resolution, and alike quitting her and England.

He seated himself at his desk one evening for the purpose of writing an explanatory or, if he could achieve it, an exculpatory and farewell letter to Sybil ; but, after various attempts, he had got no further than the date, when Mr. Jasper Funnel entered the room, with a little sealed packet on a silver salver.

It had just come in the household despatch-box from Hale, and bore the Porthellick postmark, so he tore it open with trembling hands.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LEGAL "FRIEND."

CONSTANCE never smiled again ! yet in the presence of Sybil she never gave way to the paroxysms of passionate grief that came over her when she was alone or in the seclusion of her own chamber. Wealth and title, so long looked forward to in the years that were gone, seemed alike most worthless now, save that with the loss of these her children lost their position in life, and herself her name and honour ! Ever present was the idea, Oh that her husband could look up from his grave, and see the impending ruin and desolation of their once-happy home ! for, as we have already said, their means of subsistence died with him.

And now, how were they to live ? The present time was agony ; the future dark and gloomy.

Paragraphs, the tenor of which proved intensely annoying to Downie Trevelyan and all his family, and which were painful and degrading to Constance and Sybil (for such they felt them to be), began to find their way into the local and even the London papers, under exciting titles or headings, such as "Singular Case of Presumption," or "Insanity," "The Cornish Widow again" "The Lamorna Peerage," and so forth ; and Messrs. Gorbelly and Culverhole, as "his Lordship's solicitors," in writing answers or contradictions to some of these effusions, were but too happy, by such legal advertisements, to mix their somewhat obscure and vulgar names with the affair.

Audley read those insulting notices, assertions, and contradictions with infinite sorrow and pain, for then Sybil's pleading and upbraiding eyes would come before him. Through such uncourted publicity, however, the mother and daughter began to find themselves coldly viewed by neighbours now. The rector ceased to come near the villa ; the village doctor whipped up his horse as he passed the end of the willow avenue ; and even the usually friendly Trecarrels left for town—rumour said correctly, for India—without paying another visit, though perhaps, as theirs had never been returned, they could not do otherwise.

All the charity and good they had performed, in all the necessities relieved, all the ailments alleviated, all the countless little kindnesses done, went for nothing now ; for the world is a malevolent and censorious one ; and that devilish maxim of Rochefoucauld, that people feel a strange satisfaction in the misfortunes of their best friends, was fully exemplified. Constance's new and startling assertion of rank and position, however meekly done, formed excellent food for the tongues of the mali-

cious and vulgar, who exist everywhere. She had to bear unjustly the contempt of many, the ridicule of all; so that her pretty villa became daily less and less a home.

From the tenor of that horrible interview at Rhoscadzhel, where every word that passed seemed as if burned into her heart with letters of fire, Sybil felt a sure conviction that all must and should be at an end between herself and Audley Trevelyan. The treatment of her mother, of her absent brother's claims, of her own, and of her dead father's memory, his will and wishes, all required this sacrifice at her hands; so resolutely and calmly—though a few tears rolled silently down her cheek the while—she drew his diamond ring from her "engaged" finger—an engaged one now no longer—and making it up in a packet, together with a few letters he had written to her, she despatched it, addressed by her own trembling hand, and without a word of comment, to Rhoscadzhel; and this packet it was which we have just seen Jasper Funnel place in the hands of his excited young master.

Her mother's embraces, tenderness, and kisses were her sole but best reward for acting thus; yet poor Sybil seemed the very impersonation of beauty, grief, and girlhood bordering on womanhood. The buoyancy of the former was gone; a change had come over her soft and once bright face, which wore a sad and settled expression now. It was that white woe which someone styles "the deepest mourning features can put on."

Her pencil and her piano, each so much the solace of her lonely hours, were, of course, relinquished now; and it seemed as if she should never take to them again. She looked ill, and appeared to be pining: but, sooth to say, it was less the loss of Audley than her mother's grief that affected her. The doctor, when summoned, pocketed his guinea, but did nothing more; so Winny Braddon urged Constance, but in vain, that "their poor chealveen" should be taken to the nearest *Mean-tol* (or Holed Stone) so that she might try the sovereign old Cornish cure for all mysterious ailments, by creeping through the orifice thereof; for in the ancient duchy, as in some parts of Ireland and the remote Scottish Isles, where such natural or artificial perforations were used of old by the Druids to initiate and dedicate their children to the offices of rock-worship, they are still regarded with superstition, as possessing the gift of effecting miraculous cures.

Constance, too, was ill, and in the excess of her grief and lowness of heart, she fancied herself worse than she really was; and ever present was the thought, how perilous the lonely path of life would be to a girl so beautiful as Sybil, if she—her mother—were taken away by the hand of death before another and

fitting protector were provided. Morbid at times by sorrow, this reflection made the breast of Constance a prey to the most craving and clamorous anxiety.

But a short time before, and their worldly prospects had all been so different—so brilliant and happy. Now all was dark indeed! When she thought over all the baronial splendours of Rhoscadzhel, and the many mementoes of her husband which must be there, something of hatred for the invaders of her children's patrimony and her own marital rights began to mingle with her dull despair of ever proving that she had the latter; and with all her constitutional gentleness, when she recalled the glance bestowed upon her by Mr. Trevelyan on quitting the library, and the insinuations uttered by Downie against her, in presence of General Trecarrel, too, her blood boiled up within her.

"Oh, Sybil!" she exclaimed one day, after sitting long buried in thought, "some author says, 'there are wild beasts in the human race'; and truly your uncle Downie is one of these. Can it be possible that they had the same parents—he and your frank, generous, and open-hearted papa?—that they share the same blood, were nursed at the same breast, and nestled together, as I have heard, in the same little cot?"

Sybil was silent; she had, in this view of the matter, but one secret and reclaiming thought. Downie was Audley's father, and she would be merciful.

But it was when inspired by one of those gusts of indignation that Constance received, perhaps, unfortunately, a visitor—an attorney from a neighbouring town—who stated that he had heard her strange and painful story, and had come to make a "friendly" offer of his legal services.

Now Mr. Sharkley—for such was his name—was exactly, in many respects, what Downie, in his rage, called him, and was an excellent specimen of perhaps the most dangerous character in society—a needy and unscrupulous lawyer. He was attired in rusty black garments, that seemed to have been made for a much taller man. The collar of his swallow-tailed coat rose above the nape of his neck, while the cuffs nearly reached to the points of his fingers, and the legs of his trousers flapped loosely over his instep. He had a low projecting forehead and keen eyes, the expression of which varied only between intense cunning and the lowest suspicion. His ears were enormous, set high upon his head; and the right one, from being long used as a penholder, projected from his skull more than the left. His features would have shocked Lavater, while Gall and Spurzheim would have augured the worst of his character by the development of his head.

His legal practice—though Constance was in blessed ignorance

of the circumstance—was of the lowest kind, and had seldom proved beneficial in a monetary or any other sense to those for whom he unluckily acted as agent ; but the fellow could be, when it suited him, suave, artful, and plausible when he had a purpose to serve, and a relentless bully when it was achieved ; thus, seeing that though little or nothing could be made of the present case with the hope of success, much might be made of it in the way of money, perhaps, of notoriety certainly, and that in the end he might betray all he knew to Downie Trevelyan for a consideration—with these amiable views, he sought to worm himself as a friend and legal volunteer into the confidence of the otherwise friendless Constance.

Mr. Sharkley heard her story attentively, and committed it all to writing. That her marriage had been duly celebrated in a chapel at Montreal he doubted not, nor the reason for keeping it so secret—the absurd pride of old Lamorna, whose aristocratic prejudices were a local proverb, and hence her having, so unfortunately for her own honour, passed so long under her maiden name of Devereaux with her son and daughter.

But how was all this to be proved ?

Père Latour was dead ; the records of his chapel had been burned in one of the many conflagrations incident to the city ; the certified extract from them had perished in the sea with her husband. Dick Braddon too had been drowned, and the acolyte, the other witness in the little French chapels, had been long since laid under a wooden cross in the little burial-ground that adjoined it. A few letters alone were not sufficient proof to upset in England—whatever they might have done in Scotland—the title and succession of a wealthy peer already in possession ; yet nevertheless Mr. Sharkley talked about the instant institution of legal proceedings, having the matter brought before a select committee of privileges in the House of Lords, and so forth, quite as confidentially and as pompously as if he was a Q.C. and high-class parliamentary lawyer ; and poor Constance felt a glow of hope for her children's future rising in her heart, while he compiled a narrative, took away the letters of her husband, and, receiving in advance a handsome sum for certain imaginary fees and expenses, departed with nearly all the ready money she possessed.

He really attempted, however, to get up a case against "Lord Lamorna," and hence the bulky and presumptuous document which exasperated Downie ; but from the weakness of her cause and the character of her legal adviser it speedily fell to the ground, only to fix a deeper stigma on the hapless and innocent Constance.

Rumours of misfortune and mystery brought all their creditors,

now pretty numerous (for during her husband's lifetime they had lived in good style at the villa), down upon her in a pitiless horde.

Denzil, she knew, would now lose the liberal allowance his father had promised him after leaving Sandhurst on appointment ; but with tentage, batta, and other allowance, a subaltern can live on his pay in India, when he might starve elsewhere. In her misery Constance gathered some comfort from this knowledge, though ruin and penury—or work for which they were both unfitted—were all that remained to her and Sybil now.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DOCTRINE OF CHANCES.

AND what of Audley, the lover, all this time ?

He had written from Rhoscadzel to Constance, imploring her permission, in moving terms, to see Sybil once again, and have some farewell explanation with her, ere he departed to India, too probably for years ; for, with the usual inconsistency of the human heart, no sooner did he find himself repelled, than he felt the attraction towards her redoubled. This letter had been addressed to Constance as "Mrs. Devereaux ;" and, without reflecting that he could not bestow upon her a title already borne by his own mother, she felt fresh anger at the circumstance. Without showing the missive to Sybil, who conceived it might be on some legal business, she cast it in the fire, and replied by an emphatic refusal, adding that if he came near the villa, which they were soon about to leave, her servant, Winny Braddon (she had but one domestic now), had received orders not to admit him.

Undeterred, he next wrote to Sybil, but this effort proved equally unavailing. Resolved not to add to her mother's distress by any disobedience or duplicity on her part, she showed her the letter unopened ; and it was at once re-addressed to Rhoscadzel, with the envelope unbroken, and Audley flushed to the temples when it was placed in his hand.

He felt himself to be still solemnly engaged to Sybil, yet hopelessly separated from her, through no fault of his own—separated without even a lovers' quarrel. He wondered now at the selfish thoughts which more than once had occurred to him, particularly on that day when he quitted the library, and even the house, in such haste to avoid her ; and times there were when he blushed at the memory of it. Relations they were unquestionably by blood, whether there had been a marriage or no marriage ; and

this made Audley reflect all the more deeply and tenderly on the subject of his severed ties with Sybil.

He wished to restore the ring to her in person—to replace it on her finger as a memento of himself, for the repossession of it made him restless and uneasy, as the crazed Halfheller with his bottle-imp ; and, if he was to do this, there was no time to be lost, as he had but one day to spend in Cornwall now.

The wild longing or craving to see her once again, to have an explanation of some kind—he knew not what, but beyond anything a letter could contain (even were she permitted to receive it)—still inspired him, though prudence might have suggested the utter inexpediency of further interviews between them, circumstanced as they were. Audley, however, was not of an age, neither was he of the temperament, of one to play the part of casuist.

“ Why may I not baffle them all—this strange mother, who can be so winning and yet is so repellent—my cold and calculating father too—and carry off the dear girl in defiance of all and everything ? This very night I might do it,” he pondered ; “ the train in an hour or so would set me down close by her ; and if we make allowance for human frailty and the ‘ doctrine of chances,’ why the deuce should I not succeed, for I know that she loves me ? ”

He started from a deep and easy library-chair, in which he had been seated, enjoying a pipe of cavendish, as this idea, or chain of ideas, occurred to him ; but then calmer reflection suggested a view of the future—his father’s rage, his proud mother’s disgust, his allowance cut off, and no home for his bride in India but barrack accommodation or a subaltern’s bungalow.

“ No—no—by Jove, *that* would never do ! ” he muttered, and reseated himself. Yet he was resolved to see her, if he could. Perhaps old Winny Braddon might not have a heart so flinty as her mistress, and, even if she had, it might not be inaccessible to temptation ; so that night, when dusk was closing over land and sea, saw Audley Trevelyan speeding along the Cornwall Railway, with no very defined idea, save a desire to see, to speak with Sybil, and to hold once again her little hand in his, ere he left the country, it might be for ever.

The train had been unaccountably delayed, so the hour was late—almost close on ten—when he passed down the avenue, and found himself near the villa. To hope to see Sybil at that unwonted hour was absurd ; but, after having come so far, he could not deny himself the pleasure of hovering near the place which, from its association with her presence, had for him so great a charm.

Thus it was with much of tender interest he surveyed the

façade of the little villa, the walls and rose-bound portico of which glimmered white in the light of the stars, for, as yet, the moon had not risen ; but he could not fail to observe with genuine concern that the stables, as he passed them, and the coach-house too, seemed empty and deserted ; for the little phaeton and its pretty ponies, so long the pets of Sybil, had been sold, with many other things, to furnish fees for the grasping Mr. Sharkley ; moreover, the villa was ticketed *to let*.

There might be company, guests, or visitors at the villa ; if so, even at that hour, he might perhaps see at least her figure. But no ; as he drew nearer, all seemed dark and silent—on the entrance-floor at least ; and now the barking of a watch-dog from its kennel near the house made him pause and consider how strange it was that he should be prowling thus, like a house-breaker in the night, when he might, under happier auspices, have been an honoured and welcome guest.

Constance and her daughter had evidently retired for the night, lights being visible in their bedrooms only. That of Sybil, he had chanced to know, was in the north wing of the house, and faced the garden, through the iron gate of which he could see a ray of light from her window falling on the trees, parterres, and shrubbery.

The iron gate was locked ; could he but reach her window, he might leave a message for her pencilled on a calling-card—for to write by post was hopeless ; yet he should like her to know in the morning that he had been lingering so near her. Through the iron bars he looked most wistfully at the lighted window, where once or twice the candles cast a flitting shadow on the blind. Could he but attract her attention, make her aware of his presence, and exchange a word or two, perhaps he might have an interview with her, though that would be unseemly, and what she would not probably consent to ; and yet, after relinquishing the handful of gravel he was about to toss against the window, he suddenly resorted to a plan which, if discovered, would prove more awkward still.

The locked gate barred all entrance to the garden ; but he perceived that a great espalier had its branches trained over all the wall, forming a solid and veritable ladder from the ground to its summit. The place was sequestered ; the hour lonely, and every moment of delay might be perilous, for if she had begun to undress, he would be compelled to retire, so Audley proceeded at once to scale the barrier, that he might descend on the other side.

This proceeding was bold, rash, and rude, perhaps : but he had no other resource if he would see her ere he left Cornwall, which he must certainly do, by an early train on the morrow. With

the speed of lightning, his thoughts reverted to their brief but pleasant past, and to every passage of their acquaintance ; their first meeting beside the moorland tarn ; her rescue from the Pixies' Hole : their solitary walks, and that one delightful hour in yonder conservatory, and he felt assured that she, at least, would forgive his present temerity.

Other ideas flashed through his mind, as he clambered from branch to branch, feeling them yielding the while under his feet as he tore or wrenched them from the masonry. He felt that his real object might be doubted ; that his position was anomalous and improper, and might compromise the girl he loved. What would the mess of the Hussar regiment he had left, or that of the Light Infantry corps he was about to join, think if they saw him now ? What would his cold-hearted, legal "papa"—his proud, aristocratic, and unimpressible mamma have thought of such an adventure ? and in fancy he saw the stern grimace of the former, and the latter using her vinaigrette and fan with unwonted vigour, at the idea of her son visiting any lady thus—more than all, the daughter of "Mrs. Devereaux !"

Then fears occurred to him that some change might have taken place in the internal arrangements at the villa, and that the window before which he found himself, after dropping noiselessly into the garden, might open to the room, not of Sybil, but her mother, or old Winny Braddon !

Trusting to his doctrine of chances, he hoped this might prove a lucky one.

The blind of the window (which opened in the French fashion down to a flight of steps) was not completely closed ; thus he could see the whole interior of a spacious and handsome bedroom, nearly in the centre of which stood a dressing-table and mirror festooned gracefully with white lace, and before it was seated Sybil in her dark mourning dress, with her chin resting in the hollow of one hand, the elbow being placed upon the table. Her other arm hung by her side, and she seemed lost in thought, for her eyes instead of gazing into the large oval mirror, wherein, by the light of two tall wax candles in ormolu holders, her own loveliness was reflected, were bent upon vacancy, or the floor.

Sybil's usually pale and always pure complexion, was paler now ; thus her eyes, their brows and lashes, and the masses of her hair seemed by contrast to be very dark indeed ; and the latter in rich profusion fell over her shoulders and back below her waist. In the background of this pretty picture, stood forth the white and elegant draperies of her bed, the festooned muslin of which hung in vapour-like folds, over curtains of rose-coloured silk, looped up by white cords and tassels of the same material.

A glance enabled Audley to take in all these details, and his breathing became a series of sighs as he regarded Sybil, who sat quite motionless and sunk in reverie. He flattered himself that she was thinking of *him*; but it was not so; she had just concluded a sorrowful letter to Denzil, her only brother, and her thoughts were far away with him, or with her mamma and all their coming troubles; for all those luxuries by which the wealth and taste, and more than all, the love of her dead father had surrounded them, were about to be relinquished now, and ere long grim poverty would be staring them gauntly in the face.

At times her nether lip quivered; the tears began to roll over her cheeks, and as a sigh escaped her, the heaving movement of her neck and shoulders made more apparent their graceful character and undulating curve. Then suddenly, as with her quick white fingers she was proceeding to coil up the tresses of her hair for the night, a sound seemed to startle her, she paused, and her eyes flashed and dilated with surprise.

"There it is again—good heavens—what *can* it be?" she exclaimed half aloud, and rising from her seat, as Audley tapped very audibly on the window panes for a second time.

"The deuce!" thought he, "I hope she won't scream—for that would spoil all."

With a candle in her hand, she paused midway between the window and her dressing-table, when he said distinctly,—

"It is I, dearest Sybil—Audley Trevelyan—open the window, and speak with me—but for a moment."

"Audley—you—you—here at this hour!" replied Sybil, with intense astonishment, bordering on fear.

She replaced the candle on the table, clasped her hands, and shrunk back irresolutely, for though she fully recognised the voice that thrilled her heart's core, it was somewhat bewildering to hear it there and at such a time; but summoning courage she drew up the blind, and beheld Audley's whole figure on the upper step, which formed the sill of her window.

"Oh, Audley—Audley—what has happened—what brings you here again?" she asked imploringly.

"The love I bear you," said he, humbly.

"You cannot think of entering here!"

"Far from it, dearest Sybil—I have no such thought; but pardon me for alarming you—pardon me for intruding on you thus."

"I do pardon you, but require you to explain—"

"The object of such a visit at such a time," said he, lowering his voice lest he should be overheard in the stillness of the night.

"Most certainly," said she, weeping.

"Have you indeed discarded me—with withdrawn your heart from me, and for ever, Sybil?"

"What would you have me to do, Audley?"

"There is an arbour in the garden—throw a shawl over you, and grant me but a minute to say a few farewell words."

"The moment you first asked for has become a minute—so would the minute soon become an hour?"

"In pity to me, Sybil," urged Audley, with clasped hands.

After a little indecision, seeming to listen and perceive that all was still, she threw a shawl over her head, unbolted the French sash, and stepped forth into the garden, where now the light of an uprisen moon fell in a bright flood upon the grass plots, the shining evergreens, and tipped all the leafless trees with liquid silver. There seemed a divine peace over all the earth and sky; but the hearts of these two young people were sad and aching, while Audley pressed a long and silent kiss upon her upturned face, as he led her towards the bower in question.

"I leave this to-morrow, Sybil," said he, as he seated himself by her side, and took her hands caressingly in his own, "and I could not resist the craving, the desire to see you once again, and explain much that my returned letters were meant to elucidate to you and your mamma—that I have no share in the spirit of animosity—hostility—how shall I term it?—cherished by my family against you and yours. With this family quarrel, for so shall I style it, I have nothing to do, and you, dear Sybil, have nothing to do. The employment of a legal wretch like Sharkley was, of course, a fatal mistake, making much public that need never have been so, and tending greatly to complicate and embitter our affairs."

"My poor mamma had none to advise her," urged Sybil, not heeding a slight tone of reprehension in what Audley said.

"How fortunate has been the chance that led me to you to-night!" he whispered in her ear.

"But to what end or purpose do we meet at all?"

"Fettered as I am—most true!"

Audley could only sigh deeply and press her to his breast.

"Then you—you love me still?" said Sybil, as her slender fingers strayed among his hair, the action in itself a mute caress.

"My darling—I have never ceased to love you!" he exclaimed, gazing tenderly on the pure pale face whose features he could see distinctly, even amid the obscurity of the bower. Her head dropped on his shoulder, and they sat for some minutes quite silent, and full of thoughts that were beyond utterance; yet Audley's delight was not without alloy. He felt that he loved her dearly, and yet, with all the joy of the time, there

mingled a selfish regret that he had won her so completely, as their love could never be a successful one.

"And you leave this to-morrow?"

"To-morrow."

Her voice was broken and tremulous. Audley became deeply moved as he heard her weep ; and he began to think, as better impulses inspired him, was it possible that he could relinquish or sacrifice a girl so soft and tender, so loving and true, for "Mrs. Grundy and Society?" and had he actually at one time —young officer-like—felt a little glow of satisfaction when she returned the eye of Vishnu, and he felt himself once more *free!*

In his vacillation there was every prospect of the proposal to elope being made, but prudence made him pause, and an observation of Sybil's changed the current of his ideas.

"Your father has acted most cruelly to poor mamma," said Sybil ; "and most unjustly to his own brother's memory."

"My father is a—"

"Oh hush, Audley," said Sybil.

What epithet or adjective he was about to use in irritation at the chances of his allowance being cut off, we are unable to record, for Sybil's quick little hand intercepted it on his lips.

"And now we must separate—you will find the key inside the garden gate, so no more escalading ; oh, leave me," she urged, "for if you were discovered—"

"One kiss more—one promise to remember me when I am gone."

"Oh, Audley, could I ever forget you?"

They were lingering now midway between the bower and the house, and the full splendour of the moonlight fell around them.

"And you will take back your ring?" he whispered ; and once more the eye of Vishnu glittered on the hand of Sybil. "Keep it as the memento of a poor fellow who loves you well—and you must do something more for me."

"In what way, Audley?" asked Sybil, pausing on the upper step, and near the still open window of her room.

"Keep poor Rajah for me ; my lady mother won't abide the dog, and I can't take him back all the way to India, as I am perhaps going overland by the desert ; and now my beloved girl—dear, dear Sybil—I must leave you, perhaps never to see you again."

A desperate calm seemed to come over Sybil, as she replied,—

"Situated as we are ; related as we are, and enemies as my mamma and your parents must ever be, it is indeed better that we should meet no more—yet part as friends."

"As friends—oh, Sybil—as friends!" murmured Audley, becoming more excited as she grew calm.

"Yes—this meeting and parting will form a pleasant memory to look back upon, in years to come, when we are far apart."

Often in after times did these words come back to the heart of Audley Trevelyan.

"And you will always wear my ring?"

"For life—dear cousin Audley—farewell."

She was about to close the casement, her hands trembling and her cheeks ghastly pale, when he urged,—

"I must write to you—under cover to some one—permit me—oh, permit me?"

"I cannot—I cannot," she replied, with a torrent of tears.

"I must—pardon my importunity, darling."

"Go—go, I entreat you—good bye—farewell."

She was about to shut the French sash, when a voice startled her, by exclaiming,—

"Oh, my God—what is this I see?" and as Sybil started back, Audley found himself confronted by Constance, in her dressing-gown, for she had entered the room, candle in hand, having been roused by the sound of their voices at the open window.

This *dénouement*, so unexpected, was very awkward, and liable to the most serious misconstruction; so Audley's doctrine of chances proved a failure here.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISCONCEPTION.

LITTLE could Sybil or Audley have foreseen how fatal was to be the ultimate termination of this night's adventure.

The usually sweet and placid little face of Constance was now inflamed with rage and distorted by grief. Her colour came and went, like her breath, rapidly; and through their tears, her dark eyes were sparkling with fire.

A painful silence was maintained by the three for a few moments.

Sybil scarcely understood the cause of her mother's terrible excitement, while Audley, who knew more of life and the world's ways, was filled with genuine shame and mortification on finding that his presence there was misunderstood, and the perfect purity of his intentions misconceived or entirely doubted.

Constance, on the other hand, was full of indignation against him for taking what she not unnaturally believed to be a most unwarrantable and unfair advantage of their now false position,

their growing monetary troubles and disgrace, to insult her helpless daughter ; she was furious, therefore, as a tigress about to be robbed of her young, and though fiery in her wrath, yet stately and proud in her bearing as a little tragedy queen.

"How, sir, have you dared to come hither after being forbidden my house ?" she exclaimed, in the full belief that Audley, when entreating only that he might write to Sybil, had been forcing a passage into her chamber ; "and why at such an untimely hour as this ? Oh shame, sir ! shame ! Have you neither honour nor compassion ? Could you forget that the poor girl you pretended to love was your own cousin ?" Then changing suddenly from upbraiding to scorn, she added, "Truly the legal snake Downie Trevelyan is well represented by his son, who would break into my daughter's room like a thief in the night, and seek perhaps to steal her honour, after having stolen her patrimony ! Begone, sir, instantly, ere I summon aid and have you exposed—it may be arrested."

"Oh, madam, do permit me to explain all this," urged Audley almost piteously ; but Constance, in the full tide of her indignation would listen to nothing. She showered upon him reproaches, and, summoning Winny Braddon, ordered her to ring the long disused house-bell, cast loose the watch-dog, and bring assistance. Never had the terrified Sybil seen her constitutionally gentle, placid, and lady-like mother in so wild a gust of passion ; and with clasped hands and colourless face, she turned her weeping eyes alternately, with imploring glances, from her to Audley, who seemed to feel acutely that his position was absurd, dangerous and pitiful ; so he was filled by an emotion of shame till it took the phase of irritation.

"Leave us, Audley, I entreat you—see, mamma is seriously ill !" said Sybil, on perceiving Constance press her hands upon her temples, displaying, as she did so, the snowy whiteness of her taper arms, while tottering into a chair. Audley gave the scared girl a glance full of agony in expression, and said :—

"I shall write and explain all, and she will do me justice when calmer ; to-night, any attempts at elucidation were utterly vain. I am to blame for my rashness and selfishness in compromising you thus ; but not so much to blame as she thinks, however. Your heart at least will excuse and plead for me ; and now, dearest Sybil, a long, long—farewell !"

He was gone !

Sybil stayed not to listen to his departing steps, but sprang to the side of her mother, who, weakened by past sorrow and emotion, had felt this episode in all its real and imaginary details, too much for the nervous system. She had fainted, and now lay back in her chair whiter than a lily.

Full of humiliation and anger, Audley retired, not as he had come, by scaling the wall, but by the garden-gate, which he unlocked, and then quitted the place, resolving to write to Constance fully on the morrow. Irresolute and infirm of purpose, he continued to linger near the villa, as the chill hours of the morning succeeded each other, and it was far advanced ere he thought of seeking the vicinity of the train that was to take him home. He saw the day-dawn spread over the sea, and the shadows of the land, with its rocks and precipices cast, by the level sunlight, far across its brightening waters. He saw the gray mist rising from the valleys and rolling up the brown mountain sides, as it did so revealing new ravines and hollows it had hitherto concealed. He saw the red rays light up the mighty headland known as Willapark Point ; all the barren ridge of Resparvell Down, and all the rocks and foam, and broken shore about Tintagel and Trevana tinted with marvellous beauty, and varied light and shadow, by the morning sun ; and inland, Little Minster church, secluded in its nook among the hills ; and from an eminence which he ascended, he could see amid the dun-coloured moorland, the lonely tarn and huge rock pillar where he had first met Sybil Devereaux ; and with these all her presence, and the nameless magnetic charm she possessed in her own person, came vividly home to his heart. When the hedgerows that intersected the landscape would be green and those enclosures of stone coped with turf in the Cornish fashion, would be covered with wild violets, daisies, and kingcups ; and when yonder groves of sycamore, ash, and elm, and the cherry orchards should be covered with the bloom of summer, half the world would be lying between him and Sybil !

He stifled the emotions that were rising within him, hurried to the railway, and throwing himself into a well-cushioned first-class carriage (after "tipping" the guard, that he might be free from intrusion), overcome and weary with the excitement and events of the past night, he sank into a profound slumber, and reached home in time to have a refresher of iced brandy and soda from Jasper Funnel before that stolid functionary rung the breakfast-bell, and before his somewhat unusual absence had been discovered by any one save his valet.

From Rhoscadzhel he wrote immediately to Constance, explaining that the sole object of his visit to Sybil was to bid her farewell, and entreating her pardon for the misconception and annoyance he had caused. To enable her to reply, he delayed his departure two days, but in vain. However, the circumstance of his humble and contrite letter being returned, not to himself, but under cover and unopened to his father (whom she addressed as "D. Trevelyan, Esq., Barrister-at-Law"), thereby causing a

fresh family explosion, completed the full measure of his chagrin ; and the young officer felt deeply stung by the contemptuous manner in which it was tossed to him across the breakfast-table.

" There, sir," said Downie, bitterly ; " there is your precious production ; and remember that a fool should never post his letters till twenty-four hours after they are written. I suppose we shall next have notice of an action filed against you, for breach of promise by that scoundrel Sharkley—Devereaux *versus* Trevelyan ! "

That evening saw Audley depart from Rhoscadzhel.

He repaired at once to the dépôt of his regiment, then lying in Tilbury Barracks, that quaint old tumble-down fort, whose handsome gateway, like a stately Temple Bar, has faced the river for nearly three centuries ; and there he strove to forget Cornwall and all the trouble he had encountered, amid the dissipation and amusements afforded by English garrison life to every wealthy young man.

Thus, when off duty, his days were consumed in tandem-driving, pigeon, cricket, or rowing matches ; *déjeuners*, an occasional steeple-chase in Essex or Kent (or a day's leave in London to see the Trecarrels) ; while his nights were devoted to dining out, dancing, and drinking, billiards, and garrison balls, private theatricals, and, consequently, a fierce flirtation with an occasional pretty actress, despite rouge and pearl-powder.

It has been said that " at no time is a man so prone to fall in love as immediately after his being jilted ; " but many a fair one tried her blandishments on Audley in vain ; for he had been separated by adverse fortune from, and not jilted by, the object of his attachment. A long journey was before him, and he doubted not that he would get over the memory of Sybil in time.

So passed the weeks till he would have to go to India in the spring of the year ; and thus he strove to forget her, who was yet to exercise a wondrous influence on his future life ; with the recollection of those kisses that had thrilled his heart to the core, and those soft dark eyes whose beauty made even silence eloquent.

And did he achieve this complete forgetfulness ?
Time and our story will show.

CHAPTER XXVI.

REVERSES.

MEANWHILE how fared it with poor Sybil, who knew not whether he was at home or abroad, or had already forgotten her, and married perhaps the more sparkling and showy Rose Trecarrel ?

Re-addressing Audley's letter was fated to be the *last* action the right hand of Constance was to perform in this world.

For the two days subsequent to the episode just related she remained in bed, exhausted apparently, sadder and lower in spirit than usual ; and on the morning of the third, Sybil, when drawing back the curtains to see if she were asleep or awake, to receive her daily kiss and join in prayer, was inexpressibly shocked and terrified to perceive a peculiar fixity in one eye, and that a corner of her still beautiful mouth was strangely drawn down on one side.

Paralysis had supervened, and poor Constance had totally lost the use of one half of her body !

Summoned in hot haste, the village doctor came, with his stereotyped professional expression of sympathy. He felt her pulse, repeater in hand, and ominously shook his head.

" Oh, sir, do you think there is danger ? " asked Sybil, in intense agitation.

" Hush, child—come this way," said he, and led her from the room.

" God help me, sir—you have something terrible to tell me ? "

" I have, indeed ; but nerve yourself, for she has none to depend upon now but you."

" None, indeed, save One who is in Heaven."

Her disease, he said, was *embalism*, it came from the region of the heart, and had been gradually but rapidly forming in her system for some time past ; anxiety and sorrow had doubtless induced it, and some recent excitement—that night affair, of which the doctor knew not—had brought it to a head. A second shock, he added, must inevitably prove fatal !

With dilated eyes and clasped hands, the unhappy girl listened to this sentence of death, for such it sounded in her overstrained ear and to her aching heart, as the doctor spoke it in an impressive and never-to-be-forgotten whisper, in a room adjoining that in which the sufferer lay. He then paused, and gazed with much of genuine sympathy into the pale face of the startled listener ; perhaps he was mentally speculating upon the probable future of this lovely girl, with whose sad family history he was quite familiar now.

And what was *embalism*, she asked, in a low and intensely agitated voice.

A species of weed, or little fungus, that grew in the upper region of the heart, from whence it passed, by minute fibres, fine as a gossamer thread, through the blood-vessels, till, by choking the passage of one of them, there ensued the dire effect they had seen. And was it curable? No; yet the patient might linger for months; and, he added, that Sybil must control her grief, nor let the sufferer see by it that danger was apprehended.

The doctor was gone; but he was to come again, and for some minutes Sybil sat like one transformed to stone, unable even to weep, or reply to the excited questions, showered upon her by Winny Braddon, so stunning was the sense of this sudden and unrealisable calamity. She was, perhaps, on the very eve of losing her mamma—her sole relative and friend—that beautiful, and gentle, and loving mamma, to whom she had been quite as much like a sister and companion as a daughter; for, though a parent, Constance was still so young in appearance and manner, and, till their late calamities had come to pass, naturally so gay, happy, and buoyant in spirit, despite the secret of her wedded life.

She rushed to the bedroom, and clasped the sufferer in her arms, pillowing her head upon her bosom, and so for hours she hung about her, that she might have the melancholy joy of her society while yet spared to her; and for a time she almost forgot the grave warning given so recently, to control her emotions, nor excite the now passive and helpless Constance, who, ignorant alike of her own condition and danger, and propped up by cushions, could but gaze at her wistfully, and make efforts to speak that were intensely painful to the hearer.

The doctor had assured her, that "to expect an ultimate recovery was vain; that her mother's life was but a thing of time now—as it is with us all," he added; yet, hoping against hope and these sad words, Sybil was unremitting in her attentions to her parent. Days there were when she rallied a little, and could even move her right hand, but only to become worse subsequently, and to find her breathing more laborious and painful.

The doctor was an honest though not brilliant man, and did his best for the patient, without thinking of fee or reward. Sybil, in her intense anxiety, doubted his skill: but how was she to procure that of others? There were, she knew, great physicians in London and elsewhere, but she was destitute of the means for employing them. Times there were, when, in her desperation, she thought of writing to Audley; but she knew that her mother would never have approved of such a proceeding; and their parting had been so strange, that she shrunk from the idea as suddenly as it had been conceived, and she thought, as

she whispered in her heart the words of a once familiar song, that hers was—

“A love that took an early root,
And had an early doom,
Like trees that never come to fruit,
And early shed their bloom—
Of vanished hopes and sunny smiles,
All lost for evermore;
Like ships that sailed for sunny isles
But never saw their shore.”

She thought, too of the fatherly old soldier, General Trecarrel; and then as quickly remembered that he had been present during that humiliating interview at Rhoscadzhel; but any idea of writing to him for advice was crushed finally, when a stray newspaper announced one day, that the General “and his family” had sailed in the *Netley* transport for India, his extra aide-de-camp, the Honourable Mr. Audley Trevelyan, having proceeded overland, to serve on his staff in the new campaign against the Afghans.

Something of secret satisfaction mingled with the sorrow and fear of the lonely girl, as she read this paragraph—which she did a great many times—satisfaction that Audley had *not* gone in the same vessel with these gay Trecarrels, which he could easily have done, if so disposed; sorrow, that they were so completely and hopelessly separated now, and fear for the events of the coming campaign in which he was to serve, and more than probably her brother Denzil, too. Sybil could little suppose that it was purposely to avoid being quizzed by the Trecarrels about herself, and to avoid the imputation, or too probable danger, consequent to a long voyage with two such handsome and enterprising flirts as Mabel and Rose were known to be, that he had with a few brother officers, started for the East overland, a less easy and luxurious journey then than it is now.

But Sybil was soon compelled by the exigencies of their situation to exert herself beyond her years and experience, for creditors, we have said, had become clamorous. Everything that could be spared was to be turned into money, and they were to seek another and more humble home. All the beautiful art-treasures collected by the taste of her parents in their continental wanderings, the oak and marqueterie cabinets, the chaste china of Dresden and Sèvres, the quaint Majolica vases, and alabaster groups, with all the most valued household gods, were dispatched to the nearest market town in charge of the useful Mr. Sharkley, and disposed of with a ruinous commission to that somewhat “seedy” personage! and a little time after saw the pretty villa, so long the abode of so much peaceful and sequestered happiness, in the possession of strangers, while Sybil and

her mamma were content to locate them in a small cottage which they rented from old Michael Treherne, the miner, and furnished in the plainest manner ; but all their debts were cleared, and even Denzil's Indian outfit paid.

To Constance all places were pretty much alike now, for she had become listless and indifferent to external objects ; but times there were when much of exasperation mingled with Sybil's grief, at the thought that her mamma—she so gently bred and nurtured, and so petted by her drowned father—she, who should then be in Rhoscadzhel, surrounded by every appliance that wealth, luxury, skill, and rank could furnish, was now in her desolate widowhood, and sore extremity, the inmate of a poor and sordid cottage.

Thus day succeeded day, and weeks rolled on without any change, at least for the better—weeks which seemed so long, heavy, and monotonous, that to Sybil the world and time appeared to stand still. No letters came from Denzil now, for he had marched up-country somewhere, and India was not then what it has been since the great mutiny of the Sepoys, intersected by railways and telegraph wires ; but Denzil's last epistle was full of unusual interest to Sybil and her mamma.

He had, of course, been duly acquainted by the former of all that had occurred at home, with the startling revelations consequent to his father's journey to Montreal, and his death at sea ; and now he should probably meet ere long this cousin of his, this Audley Trevelyan, for they belonged to the same regiment, and it was, perhaps, to form a portion of Trecarrel's brigade. And how were they to meet—as friends and brother officers, as relations or enemies ?—for Audley's father occupied his (Denzil's) place in the world, or in society at least.

Relations—pshaw !—could they ever be aught but foes ? was the young man's immediate thought, and his sister's boding fear. And so his father was gone—his good, kind father, his friend, companion, and preceptor in many a manly sport. How often had they rode and rambled, shot and fished together in Calabria, the Abruzzi, and Switzerland, and at home in sturdy Cornwall, so many thousand miles away ! Only those who are so far from home—so far away as India, with all its strange external influences and objects—can know how keen, and strong, and tender, to the young at least, are the ties of home and kindred, especially as the home ties decrease in number by distance, change, and death.

Dead—his father dead ! The “governor,” as he had styled him, like “other fellows,” at Sandhurst, his “dear old dad,” as he called him in the home that was a broken home now ; and as the pleasant face, that he never more would look upon, with years of past affection, came back to memory, the lad had covered his face with his hands, and wept.

" It is only when we have been long at sea and have lost sight of Europe," wrote Denzil, " ay, dearest Sybil, even of Europe, which seems all one country and one home to us, that the Anglo-Indian feels his banishment has fairly begun, and he is to be, henceforth, as some fellow has it, ' among the dusky people of Ind, with whom we have no traditions, no religious, few domestic, and scarcely any moral sentiments in common, and whose very costume (want of it, sometimes, I should say) is only characteristic of a much greater difference of inward nature.' And so I am actually by birth a lord—a lord ! I have thought, and many visions of future greatness have floated through my mind—and dear mamma is a lady—Dowager Lady Lamorna. How odd it sounds. Are we all losing our identity ; and how is all this to be proved ? The past mystery nearly cost me my life when I first joined, and in this fashion :

" Bob Waller, one of ours, a pleasant but sometimes supercilious fellow, asked me one evening in the mess bungalow, if ' my people were from the Channel Islands ? '

" ' No,' replied I, colouring, for I always felt that some mystery existed about us ; ' but why do you ask ? '

" ' The name sounds like a French one,' replied Waller.

" ' We are connected somehow with Montreal.'

" ' Oh, that explains it,' rejoined Waller.

" ' There is nothing to explain,' said I, angrily.

" ' Think not ?—well—have a cigar ? '

" I roughly, perhaps, declined it, so Waller returned to the charge by saying—

" ' Your father was once in the Cornish Light Infantry, you say ? '

" ' Yes—a captain—some twenty years ago.'

" ' Strange. I have looked all through the Army Lists, and can find no such name in the corps.'

" This assertion exasperated me (I afterwards found it correct), and I challenged him to meet me the next morning in a grove of peepul trees, outside the cantonments ; but duelling days are over—the affair got wind, and each of us were placed under arrest within his own compound till we exchanged mutual promises. Bob Waller and I are excellent friends now, and at the moment I am writing, he is sitting opposite me in his shirt and drawers, for we are having a glass of brandy-pawnee—the alcohol with water—and a couple of Chinsworah cheroots together ; and I must close now, to catch the dauk-boat—as we call the mail."

This was Denzil's last letter, and after its arrival the weeks continued to roll monotonously on, and still found Sybil watching, with unwearyed and unrepening zeal, by what she knew to be a bed of death.

Constance could speak but little, and then only to murmur her fears and prayers for the future of her daughter.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALONE !

AT last there came an evening which Sybil was never to forget.

She had been, for the tenth and last time, at the nearest market-town, where, in the shop windows of a druggist, who combined the dispensing of medicines with groceries, and the cares of a circulating library with those of a post office, she had been fain to display some of her sketches for sale, that she might procure certain little comforts for her ailing mother in their penury. All had been offered to the local public in succession even to that one which pourtrayed the lonely tarn and rock-pillar, where she had first met Audley, when he came to apologise for his dog's intrusion (why keep such a souvenir now?), and all had been offered in vain. Pleased with the girl's beauty and sweetness of manner, the shopman willingly enough displayed her productions (as decorations, perhaps) in his windows ; and there they had grown yellow, blistered, and fly-blown, till they were completely spoiled. Each market-day she had hoped that some enterprising Hobnail or Chawbacon might fancy one of her sketches of some well-known locality, to ornament his dwelling, but only to be disappointed, for art seemed to be sorely at a discount in the land of Tre, Pol, and Pen.

On the evening of the day in question, Sybil was returning from the town to their new home with a heavy heart. Not a sketch had been sold, and her purse was almost empty ; the rain was falling heavily, and a cold, keen blast from the Bristol Channel swept over the desolate and open moorland she had to traverse ; and her tears were mingling with the large drops that plashed on her delicate face and sodden hair. She had resolved that on the morrow—come what night—she should take means to dispose of Audley's farewell gift, the *returned* engagement ring ; the diamond, she knew, was a valuable one, too much so to find a purchaser in their now humble neighbourhood ; but the doctor, or the friendly druggist, who had her luckless sketches, would perhaps advise her in the matter ; and with a sigh, in which sorrow mingled with relief and hope, she hastened onward.

The aspect of the district by which she had to pass to reach their present abode, was but ill-calculated to raise her spirit on a wet, stormy, and gloomy evening. In the distance rose the rough granite summits of the Row Tor and Bron Welli, each

nearly some fourteen hundred feet in height, the sides of the former all covered by enormous blocks, the mightiest in Cornwall, piled over each other a very wilderness of spheroidal masses—

"Confus'dly hurled,

The fragments of a former world."

Over these mountain summits, the descending evening mists, cold and grey, had replaced the farewell rays of the red sun as he sunk beyond the sea ; the appearance of the former made Sybil quicken her steps, lest she should be overtaken on the moor, for then she should be able to see but a few yards before her, so sudden and dense are those floating vapours in Cornwall ; and the bogholes were perilous. On either side of the way—a mere cart track—stood those lines of upright stones, which are ranged along it at regular distances, and extend all the way from Watergate, over the moor, having been erected at some remote period to mark the path in misty weather ; and with a new but not unaccountable foreboding in her heart, for like Constance she was of a delicate organisation and had keen perceptions, Sybil hastened on, till she experienced a kind of sad relief on seeing the light that shone from the window of the little room where now her ailing mother lay, and where kind old Winny Braddon sat and watched.

Pausing at the threshold, she threw aside her drenched cloak and hat, and strove to smooth her wetted hair, ere she stealthily opened the door.

"How is dear mamma now, Winny?" she whispered.

"She sleeps still."

"Still?"

"Yes—the poor darling ; but in her sleep she has been muttering much of the past—dreaming, I suppose ; oh, my poor chealveen, you're wet, and cold, and weary too."

"Please don't mind me, Winny ; but tell me all about mamma."

"What more have I to tell you?" asked the old woman, mournfully ; "but you—you must have tea, or something warm ; you will kill yourself at this rate, and then I shall have two to nurse instead of one."

"No, no, I want nothing ; let me but change these wet things, and then I shall take your place beside mamma's bed."

Sad, sad indeed, was Sybil's heart on this night, for it was a melancholy one in many ways. As she sat by the plain unornamented bed wherein Constance lay, and surveyed, by the light of a single candle, the humble little room, destitute of cornice, and all decoration, with its scanty furniture, she doubted at times her own identity, or whether this was not all a dream,

from which she must awake to find herself at home in the villa—at home, in that pretty room where Audley saw her last, and where the windows opened to a beautiful flower garden.

And was this poor, wan and wasted invalid, so helpless and so passive now, her once merry and handsome mamma, whose hands had so loved to stray among her hair; who had hung over her little cot in infancy, and whose nightly and morning kisses would never come again; whose companionship she had shared like a younger sister, and with whom she had spent so many happy years?

All was very still in that sick room.

In the hall, a great old-fashioned Dutch clock tick-tacked slowly and monotonously; without, the night was wild, and prolonged and angry blasts of wind swept over the desolate moor with a bellowing sound, that made the sleeper stir uneasily; and lost in thought, the pale girl sat there listening to the blast, the rain, and the clock, sounds that repeated themselves over and over again in dreary uniformity.

On this night she thought much of her absent brother. She had written to him that very morning, imploring him, if he met with Audley, to be friendly with him, as their secret claims to the name of Trevelyan and the Lamorna peerage could never be established now; and thus she hoped and begged that he, like herself, would retain their mother's name of Devereaux, as they had always been known by it and by no other.

Sybil must have dropped asleep, for she started to find the old clock wheezing and whirring as it struck the hour of three; and shivered, for she was stiff and chilled; the candle had nearly burned down, and what Winny Braddon would have called “a shroud” had guttered over the side of it; and Sybil felt fully how cheerless and depressing is the slow approach of morning in a sick room—more than all, of a morning so hopeless as each successive one proved now.

The rain and the wind were over; the clouds were divided in heaven, and the stars shone out brightly; the weather was calm, and no sound came to Sybil's ear save the tick-tack of the old clock, and the breathing of the sufferer, which seemed laborious and irregular.

Shading the light with her hand, Sybil stole a glance at her mother's face, and an alteration in its expression filled her with such terror, that a cry almost escaped her. The mouth was more distorted, and the eyes—for Constance was quite awake—were regarding her with a strange, keen, sad and weird expression. At that moment, however, Winny, hearing her young mistress stir, appeared at the door of the room.

“Oh, Winny!” whispered Sybil in an agony of alarm, “there

is a change come over mamma ; go—go at once for the doctor, ere it is perhaps too—too late ! No, no ; you are old and frail, and the moor is wet," she suddenly added ; " get me my hat and cloak—I, myself, shall fly for him."

" No, no, darling ; stay by her side—she may not be long spared to you, and I shall go. Past three in the morning, and dark as midnight. I'll take a lantern and be off."

" Oh, thank you, Winny, thank you !" said the girl, kissing the old woman's shrivelled cheek, and with hasty and trembling fingers assisting to muffle her in a cloak, and to light a lantern ; and then seeing her issue forth upon her errand with all the speed her love and charity inspired, and her old limbs could exert ; and with clasped hands, and a prayer upon her lips, Sybil at the door for a little space watched the lantern (Winny's figure was soon lost amid the gloom), as its fitful light fell in succession upon the grey, upright blocks of the stone avenue that marked the desolate moorland road, till at last it diminished to a spark, like an *ignis-fatuus*, and then she stole back once more to her mother's side.

The left arm of the latter was outside the coverlet now, and her hand, so snowy in its whiteness, rested on the edge of the bed. With her eyes full of tears, and her heart full of earnest prayer, Sybil knelt reverently down to kiss it, taking the hand between her own caressingly.

How heavy that little hand felt now !

Cold, too—its touch startled her. She threw back the curtain ; her mother lay motionless with jaw somewhat relaxed, her eyes still, and staring upward. Death was too surely there, but Sybil had never looked upon it, and only felt wildly startled and terrified. She tried to raise the head, but felt powerless.

" Oh mamma—dear mamma, do not leave me ! Come back to me, mamma—come back to me !" she exclaimed, in a voice the tones of which seemed discordant and shrill to her own ear. " Is this sleep or death ? oh, no ! not death—NOT death !"

But it was so, and how terribly pale, serene and still, how calm and peacefully she lay, with something of a smile gathering on her lips, like one who had ended the business of life before death, and who, when the hour cometh, hath nothing to do but to die."

Bewildered and awe-struck, with a wild beating in her heart and in her brain, Sybil drew back ; then she stood still and listened.

There was no sound save the pulsations in her own breast, and the odious ticking of the old wooden clock, which now seemed to have become unnaturally loud. Then emotions which appeared to be stifling came over her, and a craven terror which

she could not describe, and of which she was afterwards ashamed, as if it had been a sin or crime, possessed her, and she fled from the room, and from the house itself, for she could not remain alone with the dead ; and so, crouching down on the wet, damp soil near the entrance door, she muffled her head in her shawl.

A ray of light was streaming out into the darkness, but she could not look upon it, for it came where the dead was lying, and where the light of life had passed away.

"Heaven help me—heaven help me ! I am now alone; most utterly alone !" she moaned, and bent her head between her hands, as if the dark waves of thought were flowing over it.

Alas ! how much may be condensed—how much felt, and yet never expressed by that one little word—*alone* !

Sybil, however, fainted from excess of emotion, for she was discovered there crouching in a heap by the doctor and Winny, when they arrived together, more than one hour after, when the distant horizon was grey with the coming dawn, and the white fog was rolling along the sides of the Row Tor and Bron Welli ; and thus, in insensibility, had she found, for a time, oblivion to all her sorrows.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

BEYOND THE LAND OF THE SUN.

FAR, far away from rough and rocky Cornwall—from steep Tintagel with all its memories of King Arthur's knights, his "Table Round" and flirting queen ; from the traditional haunts of its giant Tregeagle, and from its wondrous mines deep, deep down below even the blue waves of the Atlantic ; far away beyond the Indus and the frontiers of British India, fifteen hundred miles from Calcutta, and seven hundred from the shores of the Arabian Gulf, we have to change the scene to where a British army, under General Elphinstone, was cantoned before the City of Cabul, ere we can look after the fortunes of Denzil Devereaux, of whom we have barely thought, while progressing through a large portion of our story.

A detachment of his regiment, under a captain named Waller, was attached to General Trecarrel's Native Infantry Brigade ; and an afternoon in November of the second year after the military occupation of the province by her Majesty's troops, found him quartered, with his brother officers, the aforesaid captain—popularly known as Bob Waller—a lieutenant named Jack Polwhele,

also of the "Cornish Light Bobs," in one of the little native forts, of which a dozen or more lay scattered over the plain between the British cantonments and the bleak range of hills named Siah Sung, or "the Black Rocks."

The apartment in which the three were seated, each in a bamboo easy chair and wearing fur-trimmed poshtees (or native pelisses) above their blue undress srtouts, while they idled over brandy-pawnee and a box of cigars, was neither luxurious nor splendid, being simply a portion of a half shattered tower of native construction, before the windows of which the Bengal Sappers had erected a species of verandah, as a promenade and shade from the sun in summer; but now the season was winter; and though the evening was temperate, a fire blazed merrily in the open grateless fireplace, and shed a cheerful glow on the whitewashed walls, the only adornments of which were certain caricatures (executed by Waller with burnt cork) of the regimental adjutant, of the brigade major, of "old Elphinstone," or other personages, to him more or less obnoxious. A charpoy or native bedstead, a few bullock-trunks, an overland ditto, an iron washing-stand, several pairs of boots, a few swords, whips, guns and hogspears, with any number of bottles, full or empty, littering the corners, made up the splendours of Bob Waller's quarters in the fort, from which, some two years before, Sir Robert Sale's brigade had summarily expelled sundry unwilling Kussilbashes at the point of the bayonet.

The rooms of Denzil and Jack Polwhele in other parts of the same rude edifice were precisely similar; but their soldiers were huttred in the cantonments close by.

One window of Waller's room faced the hills to the westward and the Arab-looking village of Behmaru, which means "the place of the husbandless," from a legend of the time of old—remote, perhaps, as the wars of Mohammed Ghori. An Afghan maid of high rank had been betrothed to a chief whom she tenderly loved; for the Afghans, though strict Mussulmen, neither seclude their wives, as others usually do, nor wed without duly winning them. But tidings came that he had fallen in battle against the Hindoos, on which she pined away and died. The news, however, was premature, for the chief recovered from his wounds, and returned to find only her grave on the hillside now called Behmaru; so he brought from Bourkhor one of those strange and spectral-like white stones, which when placed upright, so closely resemble an eastern woman in her drapery, and set it above her tomb. In his old age he, too, was laid beneath it, and in time to come a village sprung up there.

Another window faced the south, affording the more ample view of the huts and compounds (*i.e.*, hedges and palisades) of

the British Cantonments, and about two miles beyond them the great city of Cabul, surrounded of course by a fortified wall, as what city in that part of the world is not. Here and there rose above the flat roofs of its narrow streets the tower or castle of a chief ; the dome or minar of a mosque ; and the huge mass of its vast bazaar, built in the time of Aurengzebe, when it became the trade emporium of Central Asia ; and high over all, the Bala Hissar, or palace (wherein resided the Shah Sujah, whose power our troops had come most unwisely to uphold) and which was also the citadel or fortress—a place of vast strength ; and far away in the distance, rising like the waves of a frozen sea against a deep blue sky, were the mighty peaks of Kohistan and Hindoo Koosh, in height fourteen thousand feet above the plain, and crowned by eternal snows, unchanged in aspect and character, as the dwellers there have been since Alexander marched past them with his Greeks to the conquest of the Eastern world, and since Mahmoid of Ghuznee poured his hordes across the Indus in the eleventh century.

The boy ensign—he over whose couch a pale, sad mother hung, watching as he lay asleep and unconscious on the eventful morning of his departure—watching him tearfully and tenderly while he was *yet her own*—was now a well-knit, well-set-up, and weather-beaten looking young fellow. A few months of campaigning had changed the erratic Sandhurst cadet, whose best exploits had been breaking lamps and dismounting the college guns to spite the governor, into a practical soldier ; and all that remained in him of the mere lad had nearly given place to the quietly confident air of a man—one who could take his part in society as the leader of others—one who had faced perils and surmounted them by his own unaided energy ; for already had Denzil been twice under fire, and had, with a small party, defeated more than one plundering band of the fierce Beloo-chees.

Ignorant of the calamitous state of matters at home, and of the sorrows of his sister, Denzil, with the natural elasticity of youth, aided by the excitement consequent to military life in the cantonments of Cabul, had recovered the first shock occasioned by his father's loss at sea ; and hence, on the evening we have met him again, he was in excellent spirits.

General Trecarrel had arrived shortly before this, and was now in command of a brigade. His daughters were with him, and proved leading attractions in that little circle of British residents—the European society, military and diplomatic, in and about Cabul, of which Lady Sale and Lady Macnaghten were the recognised heads ; and Denzil had been duly introduced to Mabel and Rose by his friend Waller (who had known them in

Calcutta), of the result of which introduction we shall have more to say in time to come.

Audley Trevelyan had not yet come up country, as he had been landed on the sick list at Bombay.

The young ladies knew well the story of Constance's alleged marriage, and Denzil's consequent claim to rank ; but the tale seemed strange and mysterious, and good taste caused them to be silent, and to keep in the Cantonments and Residency, at least, what they deemed to be the secret of Denzil, who was an especial favourite with them both ; but he never took them into his confidence, though he had taken his friend Waller, one day when they were on guard together at the arsenal and commissariat fort. On that occasion but little passed, and it proved a guide for the future conduct of Denzil.

" You remember our quarrel, Bob ? " he asked.

" And the interrupted duel—what griffs we were ! Yes—well, what of it ? "

" I want your advice, old fellow ; " and then he read to Waller certain portions of a letter from Sybil, impressing upon him the necessity for silence on their now unsupported claims.

" Your sister is right, Denzil, and advises you like a sensible girl," said Waller, after a pause, during which he had been thoughtfully filling his pipe with cavendish ; " neither here nor at home—*here* most especially—can you prove anything. The important papers seem to be lost irretrievably ; that lawyer fellow—with the name so consonant to his trade—Sharkley, has failed in the matter ; so be, as your sister advises, a Devereaux till you can, if ever, announce yourself with strength a Trevelyan, and have no quarrels—she seems very sensitive about *that*—with your kinsman on Trecarrel's staff ; for meanwhile we may have the Afghans, the Ghilzies, the Kussilbashes, and the devil knows how many more darkies to fight."

Both Waller and Polwhele were unusually good-looking fellows of that peculiar style to be found in the British service, and in no other in Europe. In years they were not more than six or seven-and-twenty ; and the former had attained his company after eight years' service in India.

His stature verged on six feet ; his features were perfectly regular and aquiline ; he had fair hair, which he parted in the middle with an amount of care only equalled by that adopted in curling his long, fair whiskers. He had very white teeth, and merry, roguish blue eyes. He possessed a singular aptitude for making himself essentially useful and agreeable to the married ladies, who consulted him on all manner of things, for Waller excelled in everything, from driving a four-in-hand drag to making a pig out of an orange at supper. He shone in amateur

theatricals ; wrote verses (not always his own composition) in albums ; took charge of the band ; got up all the parties and picnics about the station, and even the balls at the Residency, if such they could be called, in a European circle so excessively limited as that of our garrison at Cabul.

Jack Polwhele was, perhaps, the more soldier-like of the two ; he was fully an inch less in stature than Waller, taper-waisted and broad-chested ; to his weather-beaten face, dark complexion, and sparkling eyes of the clearest hazel, a pair of black eyebrows, and a heavy moustache of the same tint, imparted a great deal of character ; and, being closely shaven, the contour of a chin indicative of decision—a virtue essentially military—was fully displayed. He had a smarter, perhaps more dashing, air than Waller ; but, like him, exhibited a set of teeth, unique for whiteness and regularity, when he laughed, which he always did heartily, for, like most young officers, he was a happy and heedless fellow.

He and Waller were rather considered to be two “ pattern officers ” of the Cornish Light Infantry, a corps which carries on its colours all the honours of the old war that began on the plains of Corunna and ended on those of Waterloo ; and to these are added the glories of India down to the battle of Goojerat and the terrible siege of Lucknow.

Raised in 1702, in the days of the Good Queen Anne, it has served in every war that added honour or territory to the British Empire, and numbers among its Colonels sturdy old Brigadier Jacob Borr, who, before the capture of Barcelona in 1705, during the strife of the Spanish Succession, in a dispute about precedence, fought a duel in front of the British lines, sword in hand, in his Ramillies wig and lace ruffles, with Colonel Rodney of the Marines, whom he ran fairly through the body ; Brigadier Thomas Paget, of the house of Uxbridge ; the ferocious old John Huske, who did such butcherly things at Culloden ; Lieutenant-General Leighton, of Watlesborough ; William Amherst, who was Governor of Newfoundland during the American War of Independence ; Ralph, Earl of Rosse, and others, down to General Trecarrel, to whom Sir John Keane presented the watch already referred to, subsequent to the storming of Ghuznee, where “ Old Tre,” as the soldiers named him, was the second man through the Cabul gate, after Colonel Peat had blown it up by three hundred pounds of gunpowder.

The conversation of those with whom Denzil now found himself will best explain the state of affairs in Cabul, and the new phase of society in which destiny had cast him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE AFGHAN FORT.

"So, Polwhele, I find by the order-book that you are detailed for the party against the plundering Ghazees?" said Waller.

"Yes; I shall have the pleasure of scouring all the Siah Sung after these wretched fanatics to-morrow."

"What force goes with you?"

"Thirty rank and file of ours, with Sergeant Treherne."

"Son of old Mike, the miner, at Porthellick?"

"Yes; and forty of the Thirty-seventh Native Infantry under Burgoyne."

"But I believe you are to tiff with us at the Trecarrels in the afternoon," observed Denzil. "The General's Chuprassey, a half-naked fellow with a brass badge, brought Waller and me pink notes of invitation, and I saw there was one for you."

"I shall be duly there if a ball from a juazil, or a slash from an Afghan knife, don't put me on the sick list, or give you a chance of a lieutenancy," replied Polwhele, twirling his thick black moustache.

"It is wretched work we are condemned to, at times, here."

"Yes," rejoined Polwhele; "and I fear that my little affair with the Ghazees is but the forerunner of some greater disturbance."

"However, to-morrow or the day after, the Envoy is to have a solemn conference with the ferocious Ackbar Khan."

"I don't think much will come of that," continued Polwhele. "It is to the memories of Plassey, Assaye, and a hundred glorious battles, rather than to our present numerical force, that we Britons owe our *prestige* in the East; but here in Cabul, beyond the Indus, it has not yet been felt, thanks to parsimony and utter mismanagement, civil and military."

"Don't take to grumbling, Jack, but pass the brandy-bottle, old fellow. I hope we shall keep Shah Sujah on his throne, despite Ackbar Khan and all the rebellious rabble in Afghanistan. What was up in your quarter yesterday? You were on guard near the old tomb and temple westward of the Cantonments."

"Up—how?"

"I heard a sound of musketry near it."

"One discharge?"

"Yes."

"Oh—you remember that odd-looking fellow who appeared at the band-stand and cut such strange capers when the musicians of the 37th were playing an air from Rossini. Well, he proved

to be a Thug, and all the implements of Thuggee—the holy pick-axe, the handkerchief and cord for strangulation, were found upon him."

"Not in his clothes," said Denzil, "for he had none, so the orderlies switched him away from the vicinity of the Trecarrels' carriage."

"I saw those wags of girls in fits of laughter at him. No, the implements were not found in his clothes, certainly, but in his hair, which hung below his waist, plaited like ropes. Many murders—he had strangled Christians and Hindoos with perfect impartiality—were fully proved against him by the Provost-Marshal, so he was shot, off-hand, to save all further trouble."

"So those Thugs are a sect?" said Denzil.

"Yes; and a vast community of secret assassins, too. As for sects, you will find as many here as in England, but calling themselves by different names, Mahomedans, Soonies, Ismaelites, Parsees, Hindoos, Bhells, Khonds, and worshippers of Mumbo Jumbo, et cetera, all hating each other most cordially; and by Jove, amid them, we may say as the knight of La Mancha said to his squire, 'Here, brother Sancho, we can put our hands up to the elbows in what are called adventures.'"

"Who are to be at the Trecarrels' to-morrow?" asked Waller, manipulating a fresh cigar.

"Ask Devereaux," replied Polwhele, sending some spiral circles towards him, and laughing the while.

"Why *me*?" asked Denzil, with a little annoyance of tone.

"How amusingly pink you become, my boy, whenever their names are mentioned," said Polwhele; "doubtless you will be 'doing' our old Cornwall all over again with Rose, though it is evident your heart is not *there*."

"Where, then?"

"In Cabul, and nearer Kohistan than the Well of St. Keyne," replied Polwhele, who, as his name imports, was a Cornishman; and he added, laughingly, "What says Southey?—

"But if the wife should drink of it first,
God help the husband then!"

* * * * *

'I hastened as soon as the wedding was done,
And left my wife in the porch;
But i'faith she had been wiser than me,
For she took a bottle to church.'

Ah, well do I remember that old spring so famed for its virtues, arched over by old masonry, above which grow five ancient trees, the Cornish oak, the elm, and three ashes, their roots entwined like a network in the turf and moss! But to return to

the Trecarrels and their tiffin to-morrow, if I escape the Ghazeas, who are we likely to meet?"

"Well, I have heard that Lady Sale—"

"The wife of 'Fighting Bob' of the 13th Light Infantry!"

"—Is to be there; the General Commanding too, if his health will permit it, and most likely her Majesty's Envoy to the Shah," continued Denzil, still colouring plainly and deeply.

"I knew that you could tell us all about it; for, of course, the fair Rose employed you to write all the little pink notes on the perfumed paper. You seem very soft in that quarter, Denzil; but one might as well attempt to catch a meteor, my friend, as that girl's heart."

"Don't say so, Jack," urged Denzil, so earnestly that both Waller and Polwhele laughed immoderately.

"You will be like the little boy who wept for the moon," said the former, curling and caressing his long fair whiskers complacently.

"And be assured, she has a soul far above Ensigns," added his other tormentor, for unluckily for his own peace of mind, Denzil had fallen a tender victim to the flirting Rose; "yet, I must admit, that the girl—the second Trecarrel I mean—is charming; almost handsome."

"Nay, more than handsome!" added Waller emphatically, "and I must sympathize with Denzil, as I rather affect *la belle Mab* myself."

"But the old General has little more than his pay, or he would never have brought the girls so far up country else; at least, the good-natured Cantonment folks who indulge in *gup* say so," remarked Polwhele, using the native word for "gossip." "And now I must go, for Burgoyne and I mean to study the geography of yonder confounded hills which we have to scour to-morrow; and we move off from the Cantonments in the dark—an hour before daybreak."

"One glass more ere you go, Jack."

"Thanks," replied Polwhele, and then he added with mock gravity—"two of the golden rules of my simple domestic economy are, a cheroot and glass of stiff brandy-pawnee before switching the mosquito curtains and turning in; and a cup of cold tea, with a wet towel about my temples before morning parade; or at least, such used to be my custom, before we came to this Arctic and Afghan, rather than Orient region."

"And considering late hours immoral, you always come into quarters *early* in the morning."

"A third golden rule—precisely so, old fellow," replied the other as he assumed his sword and forage-cap. He was about to go, when Waller's servant, a soldier in livery, appeared to an-

nounce that a native wished "to speak with the Sahibs Waller and Polwhele on particular business."

"Now, what can the nigger want?" asked Polwhele: "a Parsee money-lender perhaps — have you been flying kites, Bob?"

"Show him in, Brooklands," said Waller; "he is no less a personage than Taj Mohammed Khan. He expressed a wish to see us yesterday, when I met him near the gate of the Shah Bagh;* so remain for a few minutes, Jack."

"Khan—is he a chief?" asked Denzil.

"Not at all," replied Waller; "it is used as Esquire with us—a title given in England to every fellow who wears a black coat; so everybody is a Khan (*i.e.*, noble) in Cabul. The world of snobbery reproduces itself everywhere; and here he comes, stroking his long beard with an air of solemn satisfaction," he added, as an Afghan gentleman of tall and imposing appearance was ushered into the apartment, making low salams as he advanced.



CHAPTER XXX.

THE WARNING.

THE Afghan who entered was tall and muscular, but spare in person, and was a very good representation of his active, bold and warlike race. His features were keen and sharp; his nose thin and aquiline; his eyes, black, glittering and piercing; but his complexion was scarcely darker than that of an ordinary Spaniard or French Catalan. The scalp of his head was shaved; but this peculiarity of the Soonies—an orthodox Mohammedan sect in opposition to the Persians who are followers of Ali—was concealed by his head-dress, a *longhee*, or cloth worn turbanwise, of a bright blue check with a red border and drooping gold fringe.

His costume was extremely simple, and consisted of a camise or blouse of scarlet stuff, with loose sleeves, wide baggy trousers of dark cotton reaching to half-boots that were closely buttoned to the limb. Over his shoulder—as the season was winter—hung a large mantle of finely-dressed sheepskin well tanned, with the soft fleecy wool inwards, and round his waist a Cashmere shawl worn as a girdle, and therein he carried a pair of brass-butted flint-lock pistols, an Afghan knife and dagger. His sabre with cross-hilt and crooked blade dangled nearly in front of him,

* Royal Garden.

and on his left wrist, secured by a silver chain, sat a hooded hawk ; for now, in the nineteenth century, as in Europe ages ago, falconry is a favourite sport of the hardy Afghans.

Such was the remarkable figure which the three young officers rose to greet. Unlike the cringing servility of the slimy Hindoo, the bearing of the Afghan mountaineer is proud, but grave and full of natural dignity ; and few were nobler in Cabul than their visitor Taj Mohammed Khan, son of the Hereditary Wuzer Golam Mohammed, a strenuous adherent of the reigning Shah Sujah and friend of the British Government, which upheld that feeble monarch on his shaky throne.

Taj Mohammed was a very devout Mussulman, and most strictly obeyed the Koran in all its precepts (save one), repeating his prayers five times daily ; namely in the morning, when noon is past, in the evening before sunset, and after dark, ere the first watch of the night be passed ; but he could not resist an occasional glass of wine.

His family had ever possessed vast influence in that remote region ; he was lord of fertile lands and vineyards in the Pughman Valley, and already two of his brothers had fallen in battle, and one been burned alive, for adherence to the Shah, whose story we shall relate in a subsequent chapter.

After being seated and assisted by Denzil to wine, which like many other Mohammedans he drank in secret, or when among unbelieving Feringhees, he proceeded at once to state the object of his visit, which he did in tolerable English, having been long an exile in one of the cities of British India, though the language of his native land is a dialect of the Scriptural Chaldaic.

" You know, Waller Sahib, that the Envoy of the Queen of England and of the great Lord Sahib Bahadur Auckland, is to have a meeting with Ackbar Khan at an early period to consult as to the unsettled state of affairs—the discontents, in fact, among us—in Cabul ? "

" Yes, Khan—we have all heard so ; and what then ? "

" Are you to be present ? "

" I expect to have the pleasure," replied Waller.

" Then do not go, and bid the Envoy also not to go."

" Why ? "

" Because the conference is a snare—a lure to his destruction and the destruction of all that may accompany him. He will perish, even as Burnes Sahib perished ! "

" We are but of subaltern rank, and may not presume to advise the Envoy," said Waller.

" Khan, in front of yonder Cantonments and under the very guns of the forts, I should scarcely say that even Ackbar Khan, desperate though his character is, would attempt such a thing," observed Polwhcle.

" You doubt me then ?" said the Afghan, proudly.

" Nay ; I only hope that you are labouring under a mistake."

" We shall see ; even Ezra had his doubts, so why not may you ? Ezra doubted the means by which Jerusalem and its inhabitants would be again restored ; but he was cured of those doubts—do you know how ?"

" 'Pon my soul, I don't," said Polwhele, repressing a yawn.

" By seeing the bones of a dead ass suddenly clothed with flesh and resuscitated with life and breath and action, for so the blessed Koran tells us," replied the Khan ; for among the Afghans so much of their common life and daily conversation are tinged with their religion, its legends and precepts, that from the Shah to the veriest slave, one might imagine the whole people to be engaged alone in holy reflections, for seldom is a sentence uttered without some allusion to the Deity ; yet, as a nation, they are lively and merry.

" I wish to do you both a service, Sahibs, as gratitude has placed me in your debt. You saved my wife in the Great Bazaar from the insults of a Sepoy soldier, who when drunk with bhang, attempted to overturn her palanquin. I wish to do the Envoy a service and his Queen too, by saving the lives of her servants : thus I repeat and implore you to give ear. Warn Macnaghten Sahib, against the conference to which he is invited, for Ackbar Khan has sworn that he will, if possible, kill every man among you save *one*, and get all your wives and female children into his possession."

" As for my wife," laughed Polwhele, " he is welcome to her."

The Afghan stared at him and frowned.

" By Jove !" exclaimed Waller, incredulously playing with both his fair whiskers this time ; " and what is to be done with the lucky fellow he so generously means to spare ?"

" He shall have his hands and feet cut off, and be placed at the entrance of the Khyber Pass with a written notice to deter all Feringhees from entering our country again."

" And has the scoundrel sworn this ?"

" By every word in the Holy *Kulma*, the creed of our Prophet, he has. Ackbar the Sirdar is the very incarnation of Eblis—the evil spirit who betrayed Adam to transgression, and yet seeks to do injury to all his race," continued Taj Mohammed with gleaming eyes and a glow in his dusky cheek, for he and Ackbar Khan were politically rivals and mortal enemies.

" I have heard that this fellow Ackbar is somewhat slippery if not more ; but if he has ventured to conceive such projects, we should have tied him to the mouth of a nine-pounder," exclaimed Polwhele, adding sundry adjectives and expletives, in which

young Englishmen are apt to indulge in moments of excitement, and again the reproving eye of the Wuzeer fell on him.

"Do not talk thus, Sahib," said he sententiously ; "know you not, that the tongue is a precious jewel, and hence it is a thousand pities we should pollute it ?"

"But would he dare to assassinate the Envoy ?" asked Polwhele, angrily.

"Tell me, Sahib, what Ackbar Khan would *not* dare ?" responded the other, quietly.

"Egad that is true, but I hope that our troops will ere long show all those fellows who plot mischief that we have not come 'thus far into the bowels of the land' for nothing," replied Polwhele, laughing : "and to-morrow I, for one, shall begin with the Ghazeeas among yonder hills, Khan."

"The Siah Sung is full of deep and dark caverns, Sahib," said the friendly Afghan ; "the Ghazeeas are cunning ; so beware alive of surprise and ambush.

"Oh that will be my look-out and Burgoyne's," replied Polwhele, confidently.

"Besides, yonder hills are the chosen haunt of the Ghoul Biaban," said Taj Mohammed, and though a brave man he lowered his voice as he spoke, for the Afghans believe devoutly in the existence of "the Spirit of the Waste," a lonely demon inhabiting the mountain solitudes ; frightful he is, and gigantic in form, devouring any passenger who comes in his way ; forming by spells the mirage of the desert to snare the traveller, and disinterring the dead that he may devour them like the wife of the young king of the Black Isles.

"I must take my chance of the Ghoul and the Ghazeeas too ; though it will be deuced hard lines to be killed by the latter and eaten, without salt, by the former," said Polwhele, laughing again.

"The shadow of the Prophet be over you and your soldiers, Sahib," said the Afghan, not without a knitted brow ; for though he knew perhaps, but the half of what Polwhele said, he saw in his bearing much of that disposition to ridicule, which is so thoroughly intolerable to all foreigners, and does us much mischief everywhere ; and to this, and some other mistakes of manner we owed many of the mischiefs that ensued subsequently in Kabul.

"Historical truth compels us to acknowledge," says the Chaplain to the Forces, "that less regard was paid to the inhabitants than could have been wished. Though they do not, like other Mohammedans, universally shut up their women, the Afghans are as open to jealousy as Orientals in general, and treating their wives often rudely, the latter could not but be pleased with the

attentions the young Feringhees showed them. It is much to be feared that our countrymen did not always bear in mind that the domestic habits of any people ought to be sacred in the eyes of strangers. And hence arose by degrees, distrust, alienation, and hostility, for which it were unfair to deny there might be some cause. Whatever errors they committed, the great mass of the garrison of Cabul atoned for them terribly."

We greatly fear that we must also admit to Messieurs Bob Waller, Jack Polwhele, and Harry Burgoyne being among the Feringhee delinquents referred to ; and that some of their peccadilloes were alleged to have gone beyond mere oglings, hand-squeezings, and exchange of flowers with the fair Afghani at the Cantonment, the Band-stand, in the Bazaar and the narrow streets of Cabul, which are barely a yard wide.

But to resume :—

"I go to the Bala Hissar to seek the secret ear of the Shah," said Taj Mohammed, as coldly and as drily as if some of the preceding thoughts had been flitting through his mind ; "I have but done my grateful duty in coming to warn you of the future storm, for the Envoy of your Queen has more than once turned a deaf ear to my advice ; and now—salaam."

And with a low bow he retired ere Waller could start to his feet and usher him out. For, sooth to say, Bob had been lounging in his bamboo chair with a leg over each arm thereof and a cheroot between his teeth ; a very undignified mode of sitting in presence of the Hereditary Wuzeer of Cabul.

"A horrid bore !" commented Polwhele ; "glad he has gone —took his tipple like a Christian, though ; and despite him of Mecca, has polished off the best part of a bottle of mess sherry."

"What the deuce are we to think of all this?" asked Denzil, who had hitherto sat completely silent, and who already in imagination saw the bright and beautiful Rose Trecarrel in the hands of innumerable Afghan Bluebeards with brandished cimitars, and Mabel waving her handkerchief like "Sister Anne" from the tower-head.

"An unpleasant rumour, any way, and we shall not go without our pistols," said Waller. "However, I hope his anxiety for his own post at Court, if Ackbar triumphs, exaggerates the situation."

"They are a strange people, these Afghans," resumed Polwhele musingly, as he filled his tumbler again, adding, "Father Adam's pale ale—water—is always mightily improved by a dash of brandy, thus."

"But I have seen stranger," replied Waller ; "when I was in China with the 26th, for there the men wear petticoats and the ladies don't ; old fellows fly kites and spin tops, while the young

ones study ; when puzzled they scratch their feet and not their poll like Europeans ; when angry they don't punch the head, but viciously pull each other's tails ; and they can write books without an alphabet in that delightful language which we see on the tea-chests. Oh, the Afghans are reasonable fellows, when contrasted with the countrymen of him of the Wonderful Lamp."

" Yes ; but the former *are* a ferocious set, and deem a little homicide, more or less, nothing. Like the Scots Highlanders of old—"

" Take care ; it is well Her Majesty's Envoy does not hear you !"

" Every man is born a soldier, I was about to add, and even every boy—a pestilent set of wasps they are—has his knife, and knows how to use it ; and they are all taught, that if these black rocks and yonder snow-capped hills have little attraction for them here below, the Moollahs add that heaven teems with Houris, and that their reward is there. Talking of Houris, we shall all meet at the Trecarrels to-morrow, I hope ; but I shan't see you till I come off Ghazeea hunting ; and, by Jove ! I would rather go pig-sticking in the jungle, or tiger-potting on a Shikaree elephant, than have a day's shooting against those mad fanatics. However, you'll see the Envoy about what we have heard."

" Of course, Jack."

And whistling a popular waltz, with his sword under his arm, and his forage cap very much over the right ear, Jack Polwhele strode away to Burgoyne's bungalow in the Cantonments, just as the boom of a gun from the nearest fort, and the clang of the guard-house gurries announced the setting of the sun.

Waller and Denzil sought the Envoy at the Residency ; but, unfortunately, he was on a visit to the Shah at the Bala Hissar ; thus a most precious opportunity was too probably lost.

We shall neither follow Polwhele to his consultation with Burgoyne about their future movements, nor to their adventures among the cavernous range of the Siah Sung Hills ; but in the subsequent chapter shall endeavour to relate on what errand our troops, some four thousand three hundred in number, had come into that remote, ferocious, and most warlike region of all North-western India, seeking to control the views and the passions of five million one hundred and twenty thousand hostile people.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT TOOK US THERE.

THE kings of Cabul in relation to their people somewhat resembled those of the House of Stuart when on the Scottish throne ; being only the khans of a warlike tribe, among many other khans and tribes ; hence the old Celtic term for the king of Scotland is simply the “chief of chiefs.” The resemblance to Scotland in the days of old, is still further carried out in the fact that Cabul was a mere amalgamation of petty republics or clans, having at their head a king, whose influence was felt in the capital, but whose authority failed to reach the fierce dwellers in the glens and on the mountains.

After witnessing many civil wars, crimes and outrages, Shah Mahmud died, and was succeeded on the throne of Herat and Afghanistan, by his son Kamran.

Meanwhile Dost Mohammed Khan, another prince of the family, seized on the beautiful vale of the Cabul river ; and the Lion of Lahore, Runjeet Sing (with whose name the newspapers long made us familiar) over-ran all Cashmere. Dost Mohammed was desirous of securing the friendship of the British Government, who sent Captain (afterwards Sir Alexander) Burnes to him ; but the honourable reception he accorded to a Russian officer at Cabul about the first year of Her present Majesty’s reign caused him to be secretly distrusted by the Governor-General of India.

The latter, with a view to secure our north-western frontier against Russian influence, and an intended invasion of the peninsula, became a party to a treaty between Shah Sujah, third son of the deceased Mahmud of Herat and Afghanistan, to re-establish him on the throne of his ancestors ; and hence war was declared against the Dost, whose ally, Runjeet Sing, refused permission for our troops to march through the Punjaub—“The land of the five rivers.” But, heedless of this, two Corps d’Armée, advancing simultaneously from Bombay and Bengal, under Sir Willoughby Cotton, ten thousand strong, soon found themselves under the walls of Candahar ; and next Ghuznee, the most formidable fortress in Asia, was stormed at the point of the bayonet, after its gates had been blown in by a petard, and there enormous booty was found.

The seventh of the subsequent August saw the union-jack hoisted on the Bala Hissar of Cabul, and Shah Sujah, an aged, effete, and most unpopular prince, brought from exile in Loodianah and replaced upon his ancient and hereditary throne, while an army of eight thousand Beloochees and other wild

warriors, sons of the Gedrosian desert, was assigned him, under the command of the Shahzadeh Timour and Colonel Simpson of the 19th Native Infantry ; for such were the arrangements of that Honourable Company of Merchants whose office was in Leadenhall Street, in the City.

The restored Shah, a cruel and ruthless prince, who blinded his kinsman Futteh Khan, by thrusting a dagger into his eyes, and afterwards having him hacked into "kabobs," soon excited great discontent among the fiery tribes under his rule, and particularly by retaining a regiment of Sikhs as his body-guard ; and so resolute and manifest became the hostility of the natives, that the situation of the small British force—now reduced to little more than four thousand men—cantoned without the walls of Cabul, grew daily more perilous and critical, while General Elphinstone, who now commanded, by age and health was quite unequal to the task assigned him.

After a long and arduous contest, Dost Mohammed became at last the peaceful prisoner of the British Government ; for it chanced that one evening, after his last battle and defeat, our envoy, Sir William Macnaghten, when riding near Cabul, was overtaken by a horseman, whose steed, like himself, was covered with dust and blood and flakes of foam.

Announcing that he was Dost Mohammed, the stranger proffered his sword in token of surrender ; for it would seem that the hapless prince had that day ridden sixty miles from the Nij-row Valley, quitting his routed host ; and he was immediately transmitted to Calcutta ; but rejecting with hatred and scorn all offers of pension or place from the British Government, Ackbar Khan, the most brave and reckless of his sons, preferred a life of rude independence in Loodianah, and never lost the hope of levying a holy war for the extermination of the meddling and Kaffir Feringhees—the infidel English ; for so he stigmatised us.

Prior to this point of time our little army under General Elphinstone had remained peacefully in Cabul, far distant from the British settlements in Hindostan. Many of the officers had built pleasant and even pretty houses in the neighbourhood of the fortified cantonments which lay between the hills of Behmaru and those of Siah Sung, two miles distant from the city ; and there they dwelt comfortably and unsuspectingly with their wives and families.

Communication with the outer world beyond the passes was however both difficult and dubious ; for the territories of wild and untrustworthy allies lay between our troops and the Indies on one hand ; and between them and the Arabian Sea on the other.

It was August, as before stated, when we entered Cabul. The violets, the tulips and the wall-flower, which grow wild during

spring, had passed away ; but the air was yet perfumed by the Persian iris ; the orchards and lovely gardens around the city were teeming with luscious fruit ; and the Cabul river flowed between its banks, where the purple grape, the ruddy apple, and golden orange, bending the laden branches, dipped in the stream or kissed its shining ripples.

Englishmen take old England with them everywhere ; and thus the honest and confident freedom with which our officers went to and fro between the camp and city, and the free way in which they spent their money, won them, for a time, the favour of the Afghans ; and the winter of the first year saw the introduction of horse races, at which a splendid sword given by the Shah, was won by Major Daly of the 4th Light Dragoons ; cricket matches, when Bob Waller held his wicket against the field ; and cock-fighting, a favourite sport with the natives.

The chiefs invited them to their houses in the city and to their castles in the country, where their double-barrelled rifles brought down the snipes and quails, the elk, the deer, the hare and flying fox, with a precision that elicited many a shout of "Allah" and "Bismillah" from the entertainers.

The winter of that year also saw our officers skating on the lake of Istaliff, six miles from Cabul—the skates being the work of a Scottish armourer sergeant. Amateur theatricals,* for which Polwhele painted the scenery, were not wanting to add to the wonder of those sequestered Orientals, to whom the doors of the houses were thrown freely open ; but with the coming spring, when the field-pea, the yellow briar-rose, the variously tinted asphodels, and the orchards in rich blossom, made all the valley beautiful, came the crowning marvel, when Lieutenant Sinclair of Her Majesty's 13th Light Infantry, an officer who possessed great mechanical skill, constructed and launched on the lake of Istaliff, that which had never before been seen in Afghanistan, a large boat, with masts, sails, and oars.

The plaudits of the assembled thousands made the welken ring.

"Now," they exclaimed, "we see that you are not like the infidel Hindoos that follow you ! You are men born and bred like ourselves in a land where God varies the seasons, thus giving vigour to mind and body. Oh, that you had come among us as

* The favourite play was "The Irish Ambassador," and others of the same kind. "On such occasions they changed the titles of the *dramatis personæ*, so as to bring them and the offices of the parties bearing them, down to the level of Afghan comprehension ; while Burnes and others skilled in the dialect of the country, translated the speeches as they were uttered."—*Sales' Brigade in Afghanistan*.

friends, rather than enemies, for you are fine fellows, one by one, though as a body we hate you!"

And so dark days were coming, for the misrule of the Shah Sujah, the intrigues of the restless Ackbar Khan, and the national distrust of the mountaineers of all foreign, especially Kaffir, intervention, were soon to put an end to this pleasant state of matters.

On the chief of the Ghiljees spreading a rumour by letter, that it was the intention of Sir William Macnaghten to seize all the khans of tribes and send them to the Feringhee Queen in London, a dreadful tumult ensued in the city, and ere the cannon could clear the streets, several officers, among whom was Sir Alexander Burnes, were killed in the confusion.

Fast spread the spirit of revolt! The feeble Shah shut himself up in the Bala Hissar on its towering rock; and it was deemed advisable to make terms with the leaders, the chief of whom was Ackbar Khan, whose conduct during the whole of those affairs curiously combined the romantic, aristocratic, and courteous tones of a half-civilised prince, with the ferocity of an utter barbarian.

A part of the garrison having been detached under Sir Robert Sale to Jellalabad, his brigade had barely entered the terrible and tortuous ravines which lead thereto, ere it was attacked by the mountain hordes, and had to fight its way inch by inch for miles, and by the middle of November, about the time this portion of our story opens, the sixty thousand citizens of Cabul and the tribes of the surrounding country were ripe for insurrection, the fiery elements of discord being fanned by Ackbar Khan in person.

And such was the state of affairs in and around Cabul on that day, when Waller and Denzil, both well-armed—as they could not forget the friendly warnings of Taj Mohammed—quitted their quarters in the old fort, to have "tiffin" (*i.e.* luncheon) with the Trecarrels in the house of the General, who had now been some two months with Elphinstone's army, but without yet obtaining that which he had been promised, command of a brigade, unless one to be chiefly formed of Beloochees from the Shah's little army, under Timour the Shahzadeh, could be considered as such a force, that speedily melted away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TIFFIN WITH THE TRECARRELS.

SITUATED between the Residency of the Queen's Envoy and the square fort of Kojah Meer, near the high road leading to the city past the base of the Hills of Behmaru, the house of General Trecarrel partook somewhat of the character of a European villa, and had been built about a year before for a wealthy staff officer, who had been transferred to Ceylon almost before it was finished ; for so do men change about in an army which is scattered over all the habitable globe.

It was two-storeyed, with a spacious dining room and another apartment, which Mabel and Rose had made a decided attempt to affect as a drawing-room, with rich draperies and many pretty ornaments and suitable decorations brought up country, or purchased in the great bazaar of Cabul. Punkahs were not required in that temperate climate ; but a broad verandah, covered with luxuriant creepers, afforded a sufficient shade for the windows, or to promenade under on wet days, or in the sunny summer season.

As in India, the arrivals were announced by a stroke on a gong. A few guests were already assembled in the drawing-room, where the General, more erect in bearing, and a little more emphatic in tone, than when last we saw him, and his daughters looking as bright, as showy and as handsome as ever, received Denzil and Waller with a cordiality that made the heart of the former to beat lightly and happily ; for he had already begun to find more than pleasure—a joy, in the society of the charming Rose.

He knew not how far this emotion was reciprocated ; but he longed with all the desire of impassioned youth for some conviction that, at least, he was not without interest in her eyes ; and Rose was precisely the kind of girl to keep him long in the dark on that point, and to give him serious doubts, unless it suited her capricious fancy to act otherwise.

He hoped that on this afternoon he might have an opportunity of testing the matter—for learning somewhat of his fate ; and felt that a glance he could read, a whispered word, a touch of her hand, would make him happy—oh, so happy !

Polwhele was already there, and looking somewhat weary and excited after his early morning tour among the hills after the Ghazees, whom he had completely routed from their haunts, after killing or wounding a dozen or so ; Burgoyne of the 37th Native Infantry was there too, and both were talking over their skirmish with the General.

Two or three ladies from the cantonments, Elphinstone, the general commanding (an old and worn-out man), with some half-dozen other officers, all in blue surtouts or scarlet *ruggies*, i.e., shell-jackets and white vests, with their regimental button, were present ; and cloudy though the political horizon around them, and with the recent insurrection and assassinations in the city fresh in their minds, they were all conversing as merrily and as heedlessly as if quartered at Canterbury in lieu of Cabul. The younger men crowded about the chairs of Mabel and Rose ; thus Denzil, so far from having an opportunity of doing more than once touch the hand of the latter, found himself obliged to listen to her father, who being a major-general without a brigade now, was resorting to the old soldier's privilege of grumbling.

"Yes, sir!" said he, grimly, to Denzil, assenting to some thought of his own, rather than any remark of the latter ; "I served throughout the whole of that victorious campaign, which saw my old friend and comrade, Keane—he who presented me with this splendid watch—created Baron Keane of Ghuzni and Cappoquin ; while all that *I* have gained has been a gold medal from the Shah Sujah, and the Cross of the Bath from Her Majesty."

"Keane's peerage was the just reward of merit, papa," urged Rose.

"Merit, in the service, is nothing."

"How so, General?" asked an officer.

"Merit is just *one* man's opinion of another," said Trecarrel, with a cynical laugh, "as some one writes, somewhere."

"Is the Envoy to be here, General?" asked Waller, in a low tone.

"No ; he is still at the Bala Hissar with the Shah."

"Most unlucky," whispered Waller to Denzil ; "I should like that message of the Wuzeer's off my conscience at least."

"Nor are we to have the pleasure of Lady Sale's presence," continued Trecarrel ; "unpleasant rumours have been brought in by an Arab hadji, of an attack on Sale's brigade in the Passes ; but luckily they are as yet unconfirmed."

"I do not believe in them," said General Elphinstone, who was seated in an easy-chair, being almost too feeble to stand ; "for after we restored Shah Sujah to his throne, we made, as you all know, a solemn agreement with the Ghilzie Chiefs, that, for a yearly sum they should keep the Khoord Cabul, and other mountain passes, open between this and Jellalabad, and offer no molestation to our troops on the march ; consequently, I repeat that I do not believe in the story of the hadji."

"That old fellow never believes anything ; nor will he give credence to the discontents around us, till the Afghan knives are

at his throat," whispered Waller to Polwhele ; " poor Elphinstone ! he is failing fast, Jack."

" Yes, but he was busy all summer planting peas and cabbages, like Cincinnatus, when he should have been getting the Shah's Gholandzees trained to their guns."

" And will you believe it," added Burgoyne, a smart and sun-burnt young officer, " Lady Sale told me that he actually ordered Sir Robert's regiment to march from this with flint-locks,* instead of eight hundred percussion muskets which he requested from the store ; an error which may be most fatal by this time, if the Passes are beset."

Waller gazed with something of pity at the old man, who was long past the years for command ; he was orthodoxy attired in his blue undress surtout, with a gold sash over his shoulder, and a ribbon at his breast, with the Order of the Dooranee Empire, but death seemed already imprinted in his anxious eyes and haggard face, which was all wrinkles, lines, and hollows. His voice was feeble, and he had a husky cough ; yet his face seemed to brighten when he mumbled hopefully of " getting home at last to die in old Scotland," though fated never to issue from the Khyber Pass, save as a corpse. And it was to him that the perilous task of keeping our little force at distant Cabul was assigned by the Government of India !

Waller mentioned to him the story of Taj Mohammed's visit ; but it was treated as an illusion ; for was not the atmosphere of Cabul full of such rumours, and was not the hereditary enmity between Taj Mohammed and the Sirdar (or general), as Ackbar Khan was named, proverbial ? Each would ever do his utmost to injure the other, even unto death. Then the roar of the gong announced that " tiffin was served," ending the matter ; the probable fate of Her Majesty's Envoy was thought of no more for the time ; for Mabel Trecarrel, with a bright smile on her upturned face, slipped her white arm through that of the aged General, and all moved towards the dining-room, between close-ranks of native servants, whose white turbans, jackets, and dhotties, contrasted strongly with their dark visages and gleaming eyes.

Rose fell to the care of Burgoyne, there were no ladies for either Waller or Denzil (and some other subalterns), who brought up the rear ; and the latter, to his infinite annoyance, found himself seated at a distance from her, and barely able at times to catch a glance beyond a gigantic plated epergne, filled with fruit and false flowers. From his junior rank and years, he

* Fact.

could scarcely have expected anything else, for ladies were still scarce up country, and scarcer still beyond the Khyber Pass ; but Denzil felt that somehow his day had begun inauspiciously.

The khansamah (or butler), and a dozen of other Hindoo servants, were in attendance ; and the business of luncheon proceeded rapidly. Polwheel and Burgoyne were still talking of their morning march into the hills of Siah Sung, and made light of killing so many of the natives, having only two rank and file killed, and one wounded severely, partaking the while of what was set before them with as much unconcern and heartiness as if they had been snipe-shooting, or pig-sticking, in the jungle, for in that part of the world danger became a pastime.

"So one of Burgoyne's sepoys was wounded?" asked Elphinstone.

"Yes, General ; his legs are scarcely quite to the regimental pattern now."

"How so, Polwheel?"

"A ball from a juzail smashed the knee ; so the limb was amputated."

This elicited a little chorus of commiseration from the ladies, but as the sufferer was a native, it soon subsided.

"Any word, General, of your aide-de-camp Trevelyan of ours?" asked Waller.

"None—save that he was off the sick list, and soon to leave Bombay and join us here," replied Trecarrel ; but if this news about the passes be true, I hope he will be in no hurry to come this way ; he is a fine fellow, Trevelyan."

(The name found an echo in Denzil's heart, which sank for a moment.)

"I knew him when in the 14th Hussars, at Agra," said Burgoyne to Rose ; "he was not then the heir to a title."

She coloured perceptibly. Denzil did not see this, but Mabel did, and she laughed.

"If the passes are actually closed, it is deuced lucky we got up those nine-pounder guns in time," said Trecarrel to Elphinstone.

"I wrote—ugh—ugh—for—ugh—*three* eighteen pounders," replied the other, coughing feebly.

"And the mistake was that of the military Board?"

"Exactly," said Jack Polwheel ; "they made it a case of arithmetic ; and in lieu of three eighteen pound guns, sent you *six long nines*, which are useless for the battery-work that Ackbar Khan may ere long cut out for us."

"Oh that hideous Ackbar Khan!" exclaimed Rose, with young ladylike horror ; "I have seen him once, and his mouth, when

he laughed, reminded me of nothing so much as two rows of piano keys."

" Hideous !" said Burgoyne ; " pardon me, is he not thought very handsome ?"

" But think of his beard ; it flows to his girdle, and birds might build their nests in it, as they did in the beard of Treg-eagle ; you remember our Cornish giant, Mr. Devereaux ?" added Rose, with a glance at Denzil, whose colour rose, like that of a girl, with pleasure.

Denzil was undoubtedly a very handsome lad, verging on manhood now ; he had his mother's perfect regularity of features, with eyes of a blue so dark that at times they seemed black ; yet they were wonderfully soft, especially when they turned to those of Rose Trecarrel ; and his hair was very fair and curly, having almost a golden tint when the sunshine fell on it. The Indian summer, and the keen breeze from the hills of Kohistan, had already browned his boyish cheek ; but some of England's bloom was lingering in it still ; and to Rose, a regular " man-slayer," a naturally born flirt, the temptation to entangle him, when she felt intuitively how imperceptibly to himself he was allured by glances into loving her, was too great to resist, for Rose Trecarrel had all the art to win a heart, and yet retain her own entire and untouched.

She and Denzil had many Cornish reminiscences, topics, and sympathies in common ; and these afforded a grand basis of operations for Rose, though perilous enough for one so inexperienced as he in *affaires du cœur*, especially with one so beautiful, so gay, and, we grieve to say it, so artful ; but " when gallantry becomes mingled with conversation, affection and passion come gradually to mix with gallantry, and queens, like village maidens, will listen longer than they should," so we shall see how it fared with Rose in the sequel.

The intense, but too often silent devotion of a lad so handsome, flattered her ; it was so different from the half-laughing love-making of such men of the world as Waller and Polwhele ; yet she had as much idea of going further—in fact, of wedding an ensign—as of espousing a dancing dervish, or an Arab faquir. Of course, she thought in her heart that the Devereaux and Lamorna affair was very strange ; but what did it matter there—beyond the Indus ?

His mother's unhappy story, his father's untimely fate, and, for some time past, the absence of all tidings from his sister Sybil, rendered Denzil at times intensely thoughtful, or, as Rose Trecarrel was inclined to deem it, interesting ; and thus, in his craving for gentle sympathy from some one (and from whom

could it be more welcome than from a bright-eyed young flirt?) made him an easy and a willing victim.

Denzil had a nervous jealousy of all who approached her ; and he envied the free and easy—to some it might seem half-impudent—bearing of Waller, Burgoyne, and others, when hovering about the sisters at the band-stand, in the bazaar at Cabul, when riding or driving near the cantonments, and elsewhere. He was not old enough, or experienced enough, to know that there could be no love in the hearts of those heedless fellows, if they were so self possessed and free in the presence of the object of that love ; and as little did he know the jealous fear that Rose had cost his sister at home !



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE APPOINTMENT.

TIFFIN over—the General's khansamah had excelled himself, for there were curried hares and quails (the spoil of Waller's rifle), roasted kid, the fat being spread on buttered toast, and well peppered; curried chickens, partridge pie, snipe and ortolans, sweet bread and stilton, champagne, claret, and Bass, with a dessert of Cabul grapes, oranges, and various other fruits à *discretion*—tiffin over, we say, like other civilized people in the land they had come from, as it had not been dinner, but simply luncheon, all filed back to the drawing-room together ; and, in obedience to a glance from Rose, from whom his eyes seldom wandered, Denzil achieved a place by her side on a sofa.

So the day to which he had looked forward so anxiously, was not, perhaps, to pass away so inauspiciously after all, for to Denzil, time seemed to be divided into two portions—that which was spent in the society of Rose, and that which seemed blankness, spent in absence from her.

Waller was hanging over Mabel, talking in a very confidential tone, so closely that his long fair whiskers brushed at times her rich brown hair. Mabel had that kind of pure profile one sometimes sees cut on a cameo, her head was gracefully set on her shoulders, and there were times when its bearing was queenly. Her complexion was brilliantly fair by day as well as by night, and her dark grey eyes had in them now a smile so winning, that Bob Waller could not help thinking that she was really a fine girl, and looking uncommonly well.

The ladies from the adjacent cantonment were now deep in “baby talk ;” the officers were clustered about the two generals,

engaged in discussing “shop,” and the probability of Sir Robert Sale cutting his way to Jellalabad, even though he were beset by the Ghilzies ; for a little space Denzil thought he would have Rose all to himself.

Long ere this he had learned that she and Mabel were somewhat discontented. This kind of station, in a species of enemy’s country, and so remote from all the world, where steamers, telegraphs, and railways were all unknown, was not *the* India to which they had looked forward, and to which they had been previously accustomed. They should have preferred Calcutta, with its streets of snow-white palaces, its stately villas at Gardenreach, the spacious course for driving, riding, promenading, and most decidedly for flirting. At Cabul all was semi-barbarism, as compared with Chowringhee, the Park Lane, the Belgravia of the Indian capital.

Rose knew thoroughly the science of dress. She never, even when in England, chose colours merely for their beauty, but such as she knew by tone and contrast, enhanced the power of her own. She now wore a costume of light blue Cabul silk, trimmed with the most delicate white lace, and she knew that she looked to the utmost advantage. As she lay back on the sofa, playing with a feather-fan, vivacity and languor were alternately the expression of her sunny hazel eyes, for she was pre-eminently a coquette, and had resolved to amuse herself for a time with her new, and as yet, silently professed admirer.

“So you are not yet tired of Cabul ?” she began after a pause.

“Oh no, far from it,” replied Denzil, with a glance which he thought, or wished to be thought, full of tender meaning.

How odd ! I used to think India a fine place, but this Cabul, oh, it is simply horrid ! There is neither a piano or harp in the whole city. To be sure there are no Europeans here, save the Queen’s troops.”

“The climate is temperate in summer,” urged Denzil for want of something better to say.

“But nevertheless, the place is unendurable, and I hope papa will soon get a command elsewhere, that we, at least, may leave.”

“I trust not.”

“Why ?”

“Can you really ask me—why ?” said Denzil, lowering his voice, while gazing into her laughing eyes, with undisguised tenderness ; then he added, “we do not wish to lose you.”

“Poor Mr. Devereaux ! I think you are very fond of papa ; for his Cornish name, perhaps,” and as no one was looking, she patted his cheek with her fan.

“I love something more than the mere Cornish name of

Trecarrel," said Denzil, tremulously ; but Rose only bit the feathers of her fan, and eyed him laughingly over it.

" But I repeat that this place is tiresome," she resumed as a pause had ensued, and pauses are always awkward ; " think of the Residency parties, with their young ladies' quadrilles and married ladies' ditto ! A man may dance in both sets, and yet have only *one* hand to dispose of. There is an absurdity, too, in having present those native chiefs like Taj Mohammed and Timour the Shahzadeh, who think the whole affair—the round dancing especially—a naughty and improper *Nautch* ; so they curl their enormous moustaches, and turn up their cruel glittering eyes, and wonder that we laboriously do that which they pay others to do for their amusement. Sunday comes, and then we have to endure what Mab calls 'a regimental sermon,' wherein the chaplain sets forth little more than the heinousness of the slightest neglect of the Queen's regulations ! Heavens ! I would rather endure a trot on a newly caught-elephant or a picnic in a wet jungle ! Oh, may I trouble you, dear Mr. Devereaux ?" she whispered suddenly, and so close that her auburn hair brushed his cheek ; " my bracelet has fallen."

The ornament, an elaborate Delhi bangle—a golden miracle of carving—was, not very speedily, clasped by Denzil on the white, veined wrist ; and while doing so she permitted her hand for an instant to touch, to linger in his. Was he awkward? was the clasp stiff, that a thrill went to his heart? But her eyes were sparkling with coquetry, as she expressed her thanks for the little service she had ensured by specially and purposely letting her bracelet fall.

" How that young fellow is 'going the pace,'" whispered Pol-whale to Burgoyne, with a covert laugh.

" Of course you can never feel dull when in your quarters, Mr. Devereaux ?" said Rose ; " young officers are said to have so many resources."

" Far from it ; and, to tell the truth, I am always dull, weary, and even sad, when not—here. You can never know," he added, colouring at the pointedness of his own remark, " how stupidly we fellows pass the time in cantonments ; it is getting through the day anyhow—sipping everything, from iced champagne to cold tea and pale ale ; smoking everything, from Latakia to Chinsurrah cheroots ; and making bets on everything, from drawing the longest straw out of the bungalow roof to naming the winner of the Derby or St. Leger, the bet to be determined six months after, perhaps, when the mail reaches us."

" A profitable way of spending one's day. Do none of you, as a pastime, ever attempt to fall in love ?"

The question was one of positive cruelty ; but the beautiful

eyes only beamed brighter with fun as she put this perilous query, which she would never have uttered to men like Waller or Polwhele.

She fanned herself, and waited for a reply.

"For others I cannot say," said Denzil, in low voice; "for myself, never till I came to Cabul—never till I met, I dare not here say *who*."

"For a griff, Devereaux, you give a capital answer," said Burgoyné, who had been gradually drawing near them; "we both fall in love and out of it too," he added, with a laugh that was almost saucy, for he had already suffered something at Rose's hands. "Love, like a month's pay, does not last for ever."

"Even in marriage, do you mean?" asked a lady, looking up from a book of prints.

"Less then, perhaps, according to Mr. Polwhele," said Rose "orange blossoms fade and die as well as summer leaves."

"What a lovely little cynic it is!" said Waller in Mabel's ear "but she never means all she says."

The conversation now became general; and, save for a speaking glance from time to time, and—once at least—when their hands touched (involuntarily, of course), Denzil felt that his chances with Rose were over for the day.

"Our band plays to-morrow at the grand stand," said an officer of the 54th Native Infantry.

As he spoke, Denzil's eyes met those of Rose, and swift as lightning each knew where to look for the other on the morrow.

"Save with the regimental bands," said Mabel, "Rossini Bellini, and Chimarosa are all lost to us here. Papa strove hard to bring our piano up country, but it was lost in the Khyber Pass by the native artillery (who had tied it on a field-piece), when some wild Khyberees appeared; and they, finding that the box emitted sounds, fired a score of juzail* balls through it on speculation."

"When I was in the Ceylon Rifles," said a Queen's officer "I have actually seen a piano placed in four bowls of water."

"For what purpose?" asked Mabel.

"To prevent the white ants from eating it up; and I was once at a dancing party in Trincomalee when, from the extreme humidity of climate, the piano—one of Broadwood's best—went all to pieces, like a house of cards; so up here, at Cabul, we can't say what might happen."

"Have you seen the account in an English paper of the late skirmish with Nott's people at Candahar, and the queer story about the wounded being carried off?" asked General Trecarrel

* The Afghan rifle; hence *juzailches*, or riflemen.

"No," replied Burgoyne, "what was it? Something extremely 'verdant,' of course, if it referred to India."

"Exactly. General Nott reported that he had thirty rank and file killed, but thrice that number wounded were all carried off by dhooleys to the hills; on which event the editor expresses his horror in having to record that the savage tribe known as the *Dhooleys* swooped down from their native mountains, and bore away the helpless wounded in their remorseless clutches!"

Dhooleys being simply palanquins or litters, the Indian reader may imagine—as a little fun goes a long way when "up country"—how the mistake was laughed at, and how it made old Elphinstone laugh so severely that all became seriously alarmed lest a catastrophe might occur; but ere long his dhooley was announced, and the party began to disperse; and Denzil, the last to leave, lingered a moment behind his two friends.

"The band, you have heard, plays at two to-morrow," said Rose, in a low voice.

There was a fleet glance exchanged, a swift, soft pressure of the slender fingers, and in these words an appointment—an assignation—was made, causing Denzil's heart to beat wildly with joy as he hurried after Waller and Polwhele, full of dread lest they should have discovered his secret understanding with Rose, and proceed to rally him thereon. As it was, he did not escape; for, as they walked leisurely towards their quarters in the fort, Waller began thus:—

"I have been dying for a quiet cigar! By the way, what does some poetical fellow (Byron, is it?) say—that love is of man's life a thing apart, but woman's whole existence? I don't know the truth of the statement, but, anyhow, flirtation or manslaying is a part of the 'existence' of Rose Trecarrel; so look alive, Denzil, my boy, or you'll have but a poor chance, if the order to move down on Jellalabad don't come soon. It is all very well for subs to be spooney, but rather absurd for one to be entertaining 'views,' you know."

"You seemed soft enough on her sister, at all events," retorted Denzil, angrily.

"It is a maxim of mine," replied Waller, caressing his fly-away whiskers alternately, "that 'a little bit of tenderness is never misplaced, so long as the object is young, pretty, and, still more than all, disposed for it.' But, Denzil Devereaux, that girl amuses herself with you, and orders you about as if you were a Maltese terrier, a poodle, or a sepoy."

"By Jove!" the Trecarrels *are* handsome, though," said Polwhele; "and if I had not acquired the habit of making love to a pretty face, merely as a pastime, I fear I should soon be doing it in downright earnest to Rose."

Now, as Polwhele was a dangerously good-looking fellow Denzil felt nettled by his complacent remark.

"But," added the former, "I have met scores of such girl wherever I have been quartered—at home, I mean—especially in London; just the kind of girls to do a bit of Park with; to open a pedal communication with in mamma's carriage, or meet in a crush where Gunter's fellows have brought the ices; where Weippert's band invites to the light fantastic; and where there are covert squeezes of the hand in the Lancers, on the stairs, or under the supper tablecloth; flirtations in the conservatory, and soft things said between the figures of a quadrille, or in the breathing times of a round dance, when weary of chasing 'the glowing hours with flying feet.'"

"By Jove! Jack, how your tongue runs on!"

"Well, there is no general order against its doing so; and old Trecarrel's champagne was excellent. Oh, Lord! I have done all that sort of thing scores of times, and now find there was nothing in it; but Rose Trecarrel has the prettiest ankle I ever saw."

"Ah! you're a man of close observation."

"Well, I've seen a few in my time, on windy days, at Margate and Brighton especially."

"I am not a marrying man, and had I not been hopelessly insolvent since I came into the world, egad! I would pop to Mabel," said Waller, with a sudden earnestness to which the General's champagne perhaps contributed.

"Oh! you have got the length of calling her by her Christian name!"

"As you do Rose—well, but is it *not* her name?"

"Of course; but—"

"But what?" asked Bob Waller, testily; "is a fellow to be everlasting quizzed in that mess-room style, just because—because—" he stuttered and paused.

"What?" said Polwhele, laughing and pointing his black moustaches, which the Line wore in India long before the Crimean war.

"Because he has an honest fancy for a girl; and do you know, Jack, I think I *could* love that girl—seriously now."

"Very probably: but do you think she could love you?"

"True, I am only a captain, with a small share in an old Cornish mine, and no end of expectations."

"It is only being up-country and idleness."

"I'd call you out, Jack, only it is not the fashion to treat one's friends so now," retorted Waller, as they reached their quarters in the old fort. "There bangs the evening gun from the Bala Hissa; and now to dress for mess."

Some of Polwhele's thoughtless speeches rankled more in the mind of Denzil than he quite cared to show ; for he knew that if the idea struck the mind of that confident personage he would propose to Rose Trecarrel in a moment ; and Polwhele, he was aware, had a handsome estate partly in Cornwall and partly in Devonshire, and was a most eligible *parti*.

He, himself, was but a junior subaltern, and he speculated on the years that must inevitably pass ere he could be a captain. Oh, Rose would never wait all that time, and be true.

Poor lad—would he ? At least he thought so.

Long, long did Denzil lie awake that night, after leaving the mess-bungalow, anticipating the meeting of the morrow, and recalling the expression of Rose's clear brown eyes—the touch of her soft hand and her whispered words, while the hungry jackals howled like devils in the compound without ; and while, on the metal gurries of the adjacent cantonment, the sentinels struck the passing hours.

He might, had he known the true state of matters, had a sympathetic adviser in Bob Waller, who at that precise time was seated thoughtfully in his quarters—the white-washed room already described—with a leg over each arm of his bamboo chair, and his eyes fixed pensively on the ceiling, for he was thinking over Mabel's rare beauty through the medium of a soothing pipe of cavendish ; and once or twice he muttered—

“ I am quite bewildered—*gobrowed*, as the Niggers here have it—and know not what to think—matrimony or not.” And, as the night stole on, foreseeing little or nothing of the dangers and horrors to come—of the cloud of battle that was gathering in the Khyber Pass,

“ He smoked his pipe and often broke
A sigh in suffocating smoke.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“ THE BAND PLAYS AT TWO.”

YOUNG though he was, Denzil made a careful toilet next day ; mufti was not much worn at Cabul ; but he was unusually particular about the fitting of his blue surtout with its gold shoulder-scales, the adjustment of his crimson sash and sword-belt, forgetting that these were no novelties to the eyes of Rose, and that the black livery of the Civil Service finds more favour with ladies than military uniform in India, where the Redcoats are frequently at a discount, with mammas especially ; and he was on

the large circular parade ground, where the bands usually played, in the centre of the cantonments (which were an oblong enclosure, measuring a thousand yards by six hundred, with a circular bastion at each corner) long before the general promenaders began to assemble, or the European musicians of the 54th Native Infantry had assorted their music, and performed those preliminary grunts on the trombone and ophicleide, which excited the astonishment of the natives, who were present in considerable numbers, by their aspect and costume, enhancing in pi-quancy a very remarkable scene.

For the first time since they had met, Rose Trecarrel had made a regular appointment with him. It was in a very public place, however, and though it seemed simple enough to her, to Denzil the idea that he had established a *secret* understanding with her, was in itself happiness: and for the first time he wished to avoid his friend Waller, and was pleased to find that he was detailed for guard that day at an old tomb and temple where we had a post, at the foot of the Behmaru Hills.

The day was one of great beauty, and the air was delightfully cool. Overhead spread the blue and unclouded vault of Heaven, and in the rarified atmosphere, even the remote details of the vast landscape and of the city were rendered visible. Viewed from the cantonments, the plains of Lombardy do not exceed in beauty and brilliance of colour those of Cabul, which moreover, in lieu of the Apennines (amid which Denzil and his parents had often resided) are overshadowed by the stupendous mountains of Kohistan.

Crowning two lofty ridges in the foreground rose Cabul within its walls of stone, and towering high above them, rose the Chola or citadel of the Bala Hissar. The city is picturesque, each house having, as in Spain, an open court-yard, though the streets of unburnt-brick are so narrow as to be frequently blocked up by one laden camel, or to prevent two horsemen riding abreast. Thus the great chiefs and nobles have always footmen running in front to prepare or clear the way for them. There all the different races live apart, and the Persians or fierce Kussil-bashes have their own quarter fortified against all the rest.

The groups that gathered round the band were a sample of all the various tribes that resided in and about Cabul, for though many murderous outrages had been perpetrated on our people, they were still anxious, if possible, to conciliate the natives.

Each type of humanity varied from the other in visage and in costume; the fair-faced and ruddy-looking Englishman; the lean, dark Hindoo sepoy, seeming intensely uncomfortable in his tight red coat and stiff shako; the sturdier Afghan; the wild Beloochee, the Dooranee, the Kussilbash and Arab, all of whom

were admitted in limited number by the quarter-guard ; some cruel and sly in expression ; some lofty, proud and refined, with patriarchal beards that floated to their waists, and a solemnity of bearing that made one think of the days of Abraham ; and many of them armed with ancient weapons made long anterior to the adoption of our villainous saltpetre ; in their dresses and manners looking like the figures at a fancy-ball, so quiet and so brilliant in colour and variety, were their flowing Oriental robes.

Numbers of officers and ladies from the different compounds and villas in the vicinity were present ; and the "chimney-pot hat of civilization," might be seen amid the white turbans of the Mussulmen, the yellow of the Khyberrees and abhorred Jews, and the scarlet *loonghee* of the Kussilbash, for Khan Shireen Khan, chief of that warlike tribe, appeared mounted on a slow-paced, lank, patient and submissive-looking camel. Perched high up, he sat on a lofty saddle, with a tall tasselled lance slung behind him, and in front a small armoury of knives and pistols stuck in his girdle, which was a magnificent Cashmere shawl, that many a *belle* might have envied. Nor were veiled Afghan ladies wanting, and these surveyed with wonder their European sisters, as they openly laughed, chatted and—Bismillah !—shook hands with the Feringhee officers.

Shahzadeh Timour, who commanded the King's forces, was there, mounted on a beautiful horse, wearing a polished shirt of mail and a plumed steel cap, looking not unlike a Circassian chief ; and Taj Mahommed Khan, still intent on warning the Europeans of coming evil, rode by his side.

There, too, was Osman Abdallah, an Arab faqir or dervish, who had accompanied the troops from Bengal, a clamorous half-naked fellow, with hair unshorn and shaggy, his lean attenuated limbs smeared with ashes and ghee, thus compelling all to keep to windward of him, as his person was odorous neither of Inde nor Araby the Blest, while he begged for alms to send him on his pilgrimage to the three pools of Sacred Fish, kept by a holy Suyd (or Santon) among the mountains of Sirichussa ; and to him, as a riddance, Denzil threw a handful of silver shahi's (petty coins indeed) but of great value in Afghanistan, where cowrie shells pass current at about the tenth of a penny.

Amid all this motley and increasing crowd, he looked anxiously for Rose Trecarrel; already the brass band of the Native Infantry burst upon the air with a crash of music as they began a melody from an opera ; and something of disappointment and pique at her protracted absence began to steal into Denzil's heart, for her eagerness seemed by no means equal to his own.

Near him were a group of young officers like himself, but belonging principally to the 5th Cavalry and Horse Artillery.

Unlike him, they were neither silent nor thoughtful, but were staring—some through their eye-glasses—at the Afghan women, and amusing themselves with sarcastic criticisms on the quaint figures about them, especially the Khan of the Kussilbashes on his camel and “Timour the Tartar,” as they called the Shahzadeh, in his steel cap and steel shirt of the middle ages.

“There goes Rose Trecarrel!” cried one.

“Do you know her?” asked another.

“Know her—who doesn’t? Why, man alive, she’s as well known as Mechi’s razor strop, or Warren’s blacking, or anything you may see staring you in the face in the Strand or Regent Street,” was the heedless and not very ceremonious response; and if a glance could have slain the speaker, Denzil would certainly have left a vacant cornetcy in the 5th cavalry.

He turned away in anger, which, however was somewhat soothed when he heard Shireen Khan, who was gazing after her, say to Shahzadeh Timour, that she was “beautiful as a Peri,” which in his language is expressive of a race constituting a link between women and angels.

In a moment Denzil was by her side. She was in a little phaeton drawn by two pretty Cabul ponies and was alone. To avoid being joined by anyone, before she caught the eye of Denzil, she had driven them round the crowd about the band, managing her whip and ribbons very prettily, her hands being cased in dainty buff gauntlet gloves. She was tastefully dressed and wore a bonnet of that shade of blue which she knew was most suitable to her pure complexion and rich bright auburn hair; for Rose was one of those who thought it “was woman’s business to be beautiful.”

Dropping her whip into the socket, she pulled up and presented her hand to Denzil, who, we fear, held it in his somewhat long, and it did not seem that Miss Rose Trecarrel was *very* much inconvenienced by the proceeding; but he forgot who might be looking on—he thought only of the brilliant hazel eyes—the ever smiling mouth.

“And you are here alone?” said he.

“As you see. Papa is busy with the General—a move of all the troops down country is spoken of as imminent soon; and Mabel is with Lady Macnaghten at the Residency, where I am to pick her up at the gate. Will you accompany us for a drive outside the cantonments?”

“With pleasure,” said Denzil, “though this party of *three* was not exactly what he had schemed out in his own mind—for he had contemplated nothing less than a solitary ramble with Rose amid the lovely and secluded alleys of the Shah Bagh, or Royal Garden, close by; but it was necessary to quit the crowd un-

noticed, a movement not very easily achieved by a girl so showy and so well known as Rose Trecarrel ; so they were compelled to linger a little, as if listening to the band.

In the small circle of European society at Cabul, great circumspection was necessary—greater still before the natives, who, under the ideas inculcated by their race and religion, were apt to suspect the most innocent action permitted by the usages of society at home, and to misconstrue that which they could not understand—the perfect freedom and equality, the high position, honour and character, accorded to the English lady or the Christian woman, whether as maid, wife, or mother.

Denzil was too inexperienced and too much in love to be otherwise than shy and nervous. He hesitated in speech, and actually blushed or grew pale like a girl who heard, rather than a youth who had a tale of love to tell. His voice became low, earnest, and tremulous. He could scarcely tell why the momentary touch of that graceful little hand, ungloved—for it *was* ungloved now—made his heart thrill, for the presence, the sense, the language, and the glances of passion, were all new and confusing to him ; while the brilliant girl—the lovely spider in whose net he found himself so hopelessly meshed—knew how to wear her armour of proof and shoot her love-shafts to perfection.

The band now struck up a lively air, and dancing to its measure, through the crowd, which parted and made way for them, there came a group of some twenty Nautch girls, in their graceful Indian dress (all so unlike the swathed-up women of the Mussulmen), a single robe folded artistically about them, leaving one bosom and their supple, tapered limbs quite free. The leading Bayadere, though dark as copper, was indeed a lovely girl ; but her jetty hair was all glittering with missee and silver dust.

The jewels which loaded their necks, wrists, and ankles, proclaimed them attendants on the court of the Shah,* and were flashing like their own bright eyes in the sunshine, while the coils of their hair of purple blackness, were interwoven with the white flowers of the wild jasmine. Some had vinas, or rude guitars fashioned of half-gourds ; and others had tom-toms or little Indian drums, to the sound of which they sung.

As all Nautch dancing borders a little on the indelicate, Rose had now a fair excuse for leaving the vicinity of the band. Denzil sprang into the little seat behind her, as she still insisted on driving, and they quitted the cantonments by the west-gate, opposite the musjeed, where Bob Waller was listening to the distant strains of the music and killing the hours of his duty as

* Now, as in the time of the “Arabian Nights,” Nautch girls are attached to all Eastern Courts.

best he could ; and thus they escaped Polwhele and a few other who had been waiting to pounce upon her or Mabel, for they were especial favourites with the officers, nathless the ungallan banter to which their names were subjected at times.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DRIVE.

MABEL was *not* at the Residency, as the sentinels of the Queen's 44th, at the gate, informed them, she having driven away with the Lady of the Envoy to visit Lady Sale, about half an hour before. Denzil perhaps might have foreseen that the sisters would miss each other, had he known more of the inner nature of Rose Trecarrel, or more of the science of flirtation.

"How excessively provoking!" she exclaimed ; "shall we return to the band, or—drive without her? Besides we might perhaps meet or overtake them."

The idea of a solitary drive was somewhat perilous at that juncture of our affairs, as the district was much disturbed, and patrols of the 5th Cavalry and 1st Local Horse of the Shah, were on the roads leading to Cabul. All the people were in arms, and since the murder of Sir Alexander Burnes, more than one officer had been waylaid and seriously wounded. But the temptation was too great, and Denzil "supposed that they might take a little drive together;" so turning the phaeton from the Residency gate, Rose drove along the Kohistan road, in a direction from Cabul.

A wretched Hindoo *Kulassy*, or tent-pitcher—just such a creature as one may see shivering in the Strand, singing in a nasal monotone to the beating of his dusky fingers on a tom-tom—cried something in mockery after them—a sign of the times—but they heard him not. The Shah Bagh, amid the luxuriant shrubberies of which the voices of the dove and nightingale were heard at certain seasons; the quaint, old musjeed, where Waller was on guard ; the village of Behmaru ; a pile of stones marking where an English lady had been thrown out of her palanquin and murdered by some wild Belooches, who fled, leaving her unplundered, as they deem the blood of a woman bodes disaster to those who shed it, were each and all soon left behind, and they drew near the long and narrow lake of Istaliff, which is about four miles in length, and where Sinclair's boat lay now neglected among the weeds and sedges.

The vicinity of this lake, the only one in Afghanistan, was

lonely, and the hills of Behmaru bordered it on the east. There the shaggy goat, bearded like his Afghan master, and the graceful little antelope leaped from rock to rock ; there the long-haired cat and the jabbering ape sprang from branch to branch of the plane and poplar trees, and the beautiful little bird known as the Greek partridge, the *hill-chuckore* of the natives, whirred up from among the long grass ; but save these, and once when a solitary Afghan shepherd peeped forth from his tent of coarse black camlet, pitched on the green mountain slope, there seemed no living thing on their now sequestered path.

Waller, Burgoyne, and others, were older and more showy officers than Denzil, as yet ; but it pleased the caprice of Rose Trecarrel to attach him for a time, if not hopelessly, to the train of her admirers ; though there was a double risk in the little expedition of that day—the exciting comment among her friends, and the more perilous and equally probable event of some plundering natives or armed fanatics ; yet, heedless of all, the rash girl drove on, looking laughingly back from time to time, with her bright smiling face and alluring eyes, at the lover who sat behind her, striving to speak on passing objects or commonplace events, while his soul was full of her, and her only.

Fortunately, no deadly or perilous adventure marked that day's expedition ; yet Denzil was fated never to forget it.

Rose certainly was fond of Denzil ; but her love affair had, to her, much of the phase of amusement in it. In him, it was mingled with intense and delicate respect ; and every fibre seemed to thrill, when she turned half round and showed her face so beautiful in its animation, while, blown back by the soft breeze and their progress against it, her veil, and sometimes one loose tress of her silky, auburn hair, were swept across his mouth and eyes.

Denzil's hand rested on the back of her seat, and as she reclined against it, he knew that there was little more than a silk dress between it and a neck of snowy whiteness ; and as the sunlight fell on her brilliant hair, it shone like floss silk, or satin, rather, while her eyes were ever beaming with pleasure, fun, excitement, and something of fondness, too ; for he who sat near her was handsome, winning, dazzled by her, and, as she well knew, loved her dearly.

"Do you believe in animal magnetism ?" she asked abruptly.

"I don't know—never thought about it, though I have heard old What's-his-name lecture on it at Sandhurst ; but what do you mean ?"

"The strange sympathy and attraction that are created between two persons who meet each other for the first time—love at first sight, in fact."

Denzil's heart beat very fast, and he was about to make a suitable response, when Rose resumed.

"I am so glad to have the pleasure of driving you, Mr. Devereaux," said she; "but see how those reins have reddened my poor fingers!" she added, holding up a plump, little white hand, ungloved, most temptingly before him. The ponies were proceeding at a walk now, and for Denzil to resist taking that hand in his, caressingly, was impossible; the next moment he had bent his lips to it, and still retained it, for Rose made no effort to withdraw it; and this seemed rather encouraging.

"And you never were in love till you came to Cabul?" she asked, deliberately.

"Never, till I saw you, Rose—dear, dear Rose—ah, permit me to call you so?" replied Denzil, with his eyes so full of tender emotion that her dark lashes drooped for a moment.

"You must not talk in this way, Mr. Devereaux; but how is one to know true love—for there is only *one* love, though a hundred imitations of it?" she asked, laughing—she was always aughing.

"Some one says so, or writes so, I think."

"De La Rochefoucauld."

"And De La Rochefoucauld is right," replied Denzil, covering with kisses her velvety and unresisting hand.

"I never thought you cared so much for me, Mr. Devereaux," said she after a pause.

"Cared—oh, Rose, can you use a phrase so tame as that?"

"Well, I mean—good Heavens, I don't know what I mean! I never thought you loved me. I had some idea that you preferred Mabel—she is so statuesque."

Rose had never thought this; but it suited her to say so, and gain a little time. She half closed her clear brown eyes, and smiling most archly and seductively under their long lashes at him, said in a low voice,—

"And you love me—actually love me?"

"I have dared to say so—Rose."

"But you are so young, Denzil—dare I say Denzil?"

"Only a year perhaps younger than you."

"But then you are only an Ensign—and people would so laugh!"

"Let them do so—he who laughs wins; one day I shall be something more," said he earnestly.

"Sit beside me, please, and not behind; I shall have quite a crick in my poor little neck by the way I have to turn—and I shall give you the reins too."

In a moment Denzil was seated by her side.

"And now," said she, "let us talk of something else than

love ; we have had quite enough of it for one day, my poor Denzil."

How his heart thrilled again, at the sound of his own name on her lips.

" Of what shall we speak—of what else can one think or speak when with you ? "

" Oh, anything ; how do you like this dress, for instance—my ayah trimmed it ? " and while speaking she opened her soft cashmere shawl and showed her waist and the breast of her dress trimmed with—Denzil knew not what—for to resist putting an arm round that adorable waist (a movement which we dare not quite say Miss Rose Trecarrel perhaps expected) was impossible.

" Denzil—Mr. Devereaux ! " she exclaimed—" oh good Heavens ! if you—if we are seen by any one."

" Pardon me—but permit me," he sighed.

" Listen for a moment and do be reasonable. I can scarcely admit or realise the idea that you are *the* one who is to give a tone, a colour, to all my future life. No, Denzil ; you have paid me the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman ; but it may not be. Let us be friends—oh yes ! dear, dear friends, who shall never forget each other ; but not lovers ; (here she held up her ruddy lips to the bewildered Denzil) " *not* lovers—oh, no—not lovers ! "

Kisses stifled all that might have followed.

What art or madness was this ?

Denzil felt as if the landscape swam around him, and he was rather fond and fatuous in his proceedings, we must admit ; but his earnestness impressed at last the coquette by his side. She began to think she had gone rather too far, so she became grave, and a sadness almost stole over her face.

She began to consider that this love-making was all very well and pleasant so long as it lasted, but *where* was it to end ? As others have ended, thought Rose. There were moments when she could not help yielding to the calm delight with which the pure passion of Denzil was apt to inspire her, for there was a genuine freshness in it. Many had flattered her ; many had pressed and kissed her hands, toyed with her beautiful hair, aye, and not a few had kissed her cheek too ; but beyond all those, he seemed *so* happy, *so* intensely enchanted with her—seeming to drink in her accents—to live upon her smiles !

In short, he thoroughly *believed* in her, and she tried for the time to believe in herself ; and yet—and yet—with the impassioned kisses of her young lover on her lips, she felt that it was all folly—folly in him, folly in her—a folly that must soon have a painful, perhaps a mortifying end.

Did it never occur to her, that young though he was, those caresses and kisses—those words half sighed, and thoughts half-uttered, might never be forgotten by him! but be recalled in time to come with sadness as “the delight of remembered days.”

“Now do let us be rational, dearest Denzil,” said she, smoothing her hair and quickly adjusting her shawl, collar, and gloves, as a turn of the road brought them in sight of the cantonments and a patrol of the 5th Cavalry under a Duffodar riding slowly along; and on their drawing a little nearer her father’s house prudence on Rose’s part led her to suggest that Denzil should leave her.

“Good-bye till to-morrow—you will call and see us, of course,” said she, as he alighted from the phaeton; “dear Denzil,” she added, her eyes beaming with their usual witchery and waggery the while, “have we not enjoyed the band to-day?”

He knew not what he replied as she drove off and once or twice turned to kiss her hand to him, while lingeringly and with his heart swelling with all that had passed, he turned from the Kohistan road towards his somewhat squalid quarters in the old Afghan fort.

The secret understanding between them seemed to be growing deeper! What was to be the sequel, and what would the General say? But, as yet, prudence had suggested neither one idea nor the other to Denzil.

It was well for him, as after mess he lay on his *charpoy*, or camp-bed, indulging in a quiet cigar and plunged in happy reverie, dreaming over all the events of that delightful drive by the Lake of Istaliff, that he did not overhear a few words of a conversation regarding him, and taking place at that precise time in a corner of General Trecarrel’s drawing-room.

“Take care, Rose,” Mabel was saying; “I have heard of your solitary drive to-day from Polwhele, though papa has *not*—a drive in defiance of the dreadfully disturbed state of the people hereabout—nearly all in insurrection, in fact. Mr. Devereaux is only a very junior subaltern, and the Civil Service are scarce enough up here certainly; but remember that cloudy story about his family which we heard at Porthellick.”

“I care not,” replied Rose, looking up from a fauteuil on which she was languidly reclining, her whole occupation being the opening and shutting of a beautiful fan given to her by some forgotten sub of Sale’s Light Infantry: “the poor fellow loves me——”

“He has told you so?”

“Yes—so I shan’t betray his home secret, if there is one.”

“Yet you would betray himself?”

“Don’t say so, Mab.”

"Why?"

"It sounds so horrid."

"But when Audley Trevelyan—the heir to a peerage comes—"

"Audley seems to find attraction enough in Bombay," said Rose, with an air of pique; "so please attend to Waller and his long fair whiskers, my dear sister, I am quite able to take care of myself. Besides, Mab, this lad Devereaux is only one among many."

"But to him you may be one—*the one*—one only, Rose."

"I know it," was the pitiless reply.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

ADVENTURE IN CABUL.

To his intense mortification, regimental duty detained Denzil in the cantonments all the following day, thus precluding his visiting the General's house at the time he intended; but as a natural sequence to their pleasant little airing by the shores of the Lake of Istaliff, it occurred to him that at their next interview he must beg Rose Trecarrel's acceptance of some suitable love-token; and for this purpose he resolved to visit the great bazaar while it was yet safe for a European to traverse the streets of the Shah's capital, as the dreaded Ackbar Khan was not as yet known to be within its walls at that precise juncture; and evening parade being over, he hastened along the road to the Kohistan gate, and turning to the left after entering it, proceeded at once towards the Char Chouk, the aforesaid great bazaar, with his mind intent on his proposed purchase, and so full of the tender memories of yesterday, that he was quite oblivious of the manner in which the armed Afghans, the red-capped Kussilbashes, and others who were thronging the narrow thoroughfares in unwonted numbers, regarded him; how they scowled ominously, handled their weapons, and muttered curses under their thick flowing moustaches.

He was thinking only of Rose, when there were those hovering about him who required but the precept, or example, of *one* bolder or more cruel than the rest, to cut him to pieces and elevate his head on some conspicuous pole in the market-place; for the Afghans almost invariably slice off the heads of those they slay.

It never occurred to him, that in her own laughing way, her manner yesterday had been somewhat forward, over-confident, or "flirtatious," as Polwheel would have phrased it. He had

but one idea and conviction ; “ How *fond* she is of me ? ” and thus a few gold pieces which he had once intended to invest in a present for his mother—alas ! he knew not all that had happened at home—or for Sybil, his gentle sister, were now to be spent in a suitable love-gift for Rose Trecarrel.

“ She loves me—and she is so beautiful ! ” he whispered to himself again and again ; for there is much truth in the old Roman maxim, that “ what we wish should be, we readily believe ; ” and what reason had he to doubt her ? Doubtless she had flirted with many—but she loved *him*.

Followed and alternately mocked, reviled or importuned insolently for alms, by Osman Abdallah, the Arab Dervish, to be rid of whose inodorous presence he thrice gave him a rupee, Denzil reached the great bazaar, the largest in all the East (and once famed as the emporium of Asia), which was built in the days of Aurungzebe ; but which exists no longer, as it was subsequently destroyed by our troops.

Like other Oriental bazaars, it was formed of stone, like a long double gallery, arched in with wood elaborately painted, gilded, and carved, and having to the right and left bezetzeins or shops opening off it ; and in these merchants displayed their various goods for sale. The true Afghans never engage in trade, but despise it. All their shopkeepers, merchants, and artisans are generally men of other nations—Tadjiks, Hindoos, or Persians ; and, through a scowling and well-armed crowd of idle men and veiled women, Denzil wandered amid a maze of shops, some of their windows being ablaze with jewels, gold and silver work, rich draperies, divans, Persian carpets, Cashmere shawls ; shops where iced sherbet and luscious fruits were vended in summer ; shops where chupatties and sweet confectionery were sold ; others where silver-mounted saddles, gold-handled sabres, silks, muslins, and riches of all kinds were displayed ; a more picturesque aspect being imparted to the whole scene by the variously-coloured lamps of perfumed oil which hung from the ceilings, and which, as the dusk of evening was now stealing into the bazaar, were being lighted here and there.

At last he stood before the booth of a jeweller, who was seated cross-legged behind the trays whereon female ornaments of every conceivable kind for the neck, ankles, and wrists, for the hair and the girdle, rings for the ears, the fingers, and nose were displayed, all fashioned of that bright-coloured gold and delicate workmanship for which the East, but more especially the city of Delhi, is so famed. The prices of these were marked on labels in Afghan money, from the rupee and gold mohur upwards.

While Denzil was looking over these gems of art for a ring of some value as a suitable present for Rose Trecarrel, he did not

perceive that the cross-legged and remarkably cross-visaged proprietor—a huge Asiatic, who wore a green turban, declaring thereby his descent from the prophet, and who sat smoking on a piece of carpet within his shopboard, his beard of intense blackness, flowing almost to his knees—was eyeing him with a deepening scowl, and seeming to shoot towards him with fierce and insulting energy the pale blue smoke wreaths that issued from his lips and the nostrils of his hooked nose—a veritable eagle's beak.

At last Denzil selected a ring, the price of which was marked as eight gold mohurs, and was about to proffer the money therefor, when the merchant snatched the jewel from his hand, and saying, with savage energy, the single epithet "*Kaffir!*" spat full in his face. At the same moment, Osman Abdallah, the filthy, greasy, and unshorn Arab Hadi, who had been watching closely, uttered a shrill and hostile yell.

Startled and justly enraged by an insult so sudden and so foul, Denzil drew back with his hand on his sword. As his assailant was quite unarmed, he had no intention of drawing it unless farther molested. He looked round in vain for a choukeydar (or policeman), and saw only a gathering crowd, with black-gleaming eyes and swarthy malevolent visages, closing round him. How the affair might have ended there is little difficulty in foreseeing. He must have been slaughtered on the spot but for the intervention of a splendidly-equipped horseman, who at that critical moment rode up, and, seizing him by the arm, waved the people back by his sabre, and assisted by his followers, six juzailchees, half-led, half-dragged Denzil from the bazaar into the open street.

"Are you mad or weary of your life, Sahib, that you venture into Cabul in the present state of the city, and, more than all, to-day?" asked his protector, sternly.

"Why particularly to-day, Mohammed Khan?" said Denzil, greatly ruffled, and now recognising the tall, thin, and yellow-visaged Wuzeer of the Shah.

"Alas! ye are but as swine!" was the complimentary reply. "Know you not that it is Friday—a day set apart by the devout for solemn fast and prayer, in commemoration of the holy prophet's arrival at Medina; and because on that day God finished the great work of creation?"

"I never thought of all this, Khan," replied Denzil, whose heart was yet furious against the fanatical jeweller; and he might with truth have added that, so far from thinking of the prophet, he thought only of Rose Trecarrel.

The narrow streets were nearly involved in darkness now. They were destitute of all lamps; and thus, provided the Wuzeer

could elude the crowd that followed clamorously from the bazaar, he would not have much difficulty in effecting the escape of Denzil, whose blood they fiercely and furiously demanded, crying aloud that one of the faithful had been assaulted, robbed, and half-murdered by a Kaffir, a Feringhee, and so forth.

The six juzailchees who formed the escort of Taj Mohammed Khan, and who were soldiers of the Shah's 6th Regiment (a portion of the same force that General Trecarrel had come up country to command), now fixed their long bayonets and kept back the pressure of the crowd, many of whom had now drawn their swords. The high, narrow thoroughfare re-echoed with barbarous yells, and Denzil felt that he was in a very awkward scrape.

Dismounting, the Wuzeer quitted his horse, and, seizing the somewhat bewildered Denzil by the hand, conducted him down a narrow, dark, and steep alley, under the very ramparts of the towering Bala Hissar; and thence, by a steeper open slope, to the lower wall of the city, through a *kirkee*, or wicket, in a gate of which they issued, and the fugitive found himself free. Before him stretched, far away in the starlight, the extensive and beautifully cultivated valley, amid which the Cabul flows till it passes through the city—the ramparts, royal citadel, domes, and castles of which rose in sombre masses skyward behind him.

Mohammed drew a long breath, as if of relief. So did Denzil. He had been thinking of the emotions of Rose on the morrow, if she heard that he had been massacred in the streets of Cabul—helplessly, pitilessly, barbarously—and of those who were so dear at home, and were so far, far away.

“As yet you are safe,” said his guide.

“I thank you gratefully; but how far am I from the cantonments?”

“About two kroes.”

This was fully four miles English from that angle of the city, and Denzil heard him with anxiety.

“Know you the way, Sahib?”

“I do not. Moreover, it may be beset.”

“Then I must conduct you; but see! yonder are horsemen coming straight from the Candahar road. I know not who they may be. Some Beloochees are expected with Ackbar Khan on the morrow; so, quick, let us conceal ourselves here.”

And hurrying—running, indeed—with all the speed they could exert, they sought the shelter of a grove, wherein, as Denzil knew, stood the mosque and tomb of the once mighty Emperor Baber, in quieter times the object of many a ride and visit, and the scene of many a pleasant pic-nic for the ladies and officers of the garrison. All was still here—still as death—save the

plashing of a sacred fountain and the cooing of the wild pigeons disturbed by their approach. The grove and cornices of the mosque were full of those birds, which are deemed holy by the Mohammedans, because—as the Wuzeer, who, like a true Afghan, never omitted to interlard his discourse with religious topics and allusions—a pigeon had built its nest in front of a cavern in which the prophet lay concealed, and thus favoured an escape from his enemies.

"These horsemen draw near us," said Denzil, as hoofs now rang on the pathway to the shrine.

"*Az burai Kodar*—silence!" (for the love of God) whispered Taj Mohammed, as he placed a hand on the mouth of the speaker and drew him under the shadow of the trees, only in time to escape the eye of a tall and well-armed man, who suddenly appeared at the door of the mosque, in which one or two more lamps were now being lighted.

The horsemen, twelve in number, were all Afghans, and armed to the teeth. They carried juzails slung over their poshtees. Each had a double brace of pistols in his girdle as well as a pair at his saddle bow; and all, save one, who appeared to be a chief, had a lance in his right hand, and an elaborately-gilded shield of rhinoceros hide strapped to his back. They were all stately, strong and resolute-looking fellows. Linking their horses together, they dismounted with one accord, and their figures seemed remarkably picturesque in the strong light which now streamed through the door—a horse-shoe arch—of the illuminated mosque, as they entered it in succession, each making a low salaam to the armed man, who was evidently standing there to receive and welcome them.

Denzil turned to Taj Mohammed and was about to make some inquiry, when that personage, whose eyes were sparkling like those of a hyæna in the clear starlight, and whose teeth were set with rage, said in a low and hissing voice,

"Silence, Sahib, silence, for your life! These are Ghilzies and Kussilbashes; and he who received them is the Sirdir, Ackbar Khan! Now, by the soul of the prophet, the dark spirit of the devil is in Baber's tomb to-night!"

A political or military conference—perhaps a conspiracy—was evidently on the tapis; and great though the risk of discovery—a cruel and immediate death—Taj Mohammed, in his dread and hatred of a powerful and hereditary foe and would-be supplanter, crept forward that he might overhear; and following his example, Denzil was rash enough to climb, by the rich carvings of the mosque, to one of the openings, which, for religious purposes, were left in its eastern wall; and peeping in, he saw a somewhat remarkable scene—one which, so far as regarded

character, costume and spirit, resembled one in the middle ages, rather than in her present Majesty's reign.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MOSQUE OF BABER.

UNDER the dome or centre of this edifice was formed a lofty hall of circular shape, rising from horse-shoe arches that sprang from slender pillars of white marble. In the centre of each arch hung a silver lamp, but only two were lighted. On one side stood a pulpit of the purest white marble, and on the other a gilded gallery for the Shah, when it pleased him to come hither and pray at the tomb of his remote predecessor. Opposite this stood an altar, where the name of the Deity was painted in brilliant arabesques, and two enormous candles, each a foot in diameter, stood at each end of it on gilded pedestals.

In the middle of this place, and amid a group of armed Afghan chiefs, stood one whom Taj Mohammed indicated by a sign, to be the Prince, Ackbar Khan, our most bitter enemy in that half-barbarous land ; and it was not without some emotions of interest and excitement that Denzil looked upon this son of Dost Mohammed—one whose character for cruelty and recklessness of human suffering and human life was so notorious.

Fairer than Afghans usually are, he was a man of distinguished bearing, with a magnificent black beard ; but, for the purpose of disguise, was clad as yet in the humble attire of a shepherd ; thus it contrasted strongly with the brilliant colours worn by Shireen Khan of the Kussilbashes, Ameen Oollah Khan, the Ghazee chiefs, and others, to whom he was now speaking with animation, ever and anon, while he did so, grinding those teeth of which Rose Trecarrel had spoken so disparagingly.

This Ackbar Khan was simply a monster in cruelty ; he had been known to have a man flayed alive in his presence, "commencing at the feet and continuing upwards, till the sufferer was relieved by death." A favourite and brave follower of his own, named Pesh Khedmut—one who had been with him in all his defeats, flights, and varieties of fortune, was once assisting him to mount his horse, when some portion of his loose flowing dress caught the lock of a pistol. It exploded, and the terrible Ackbar was slightly wounded. In vain did the luckless Khedmut swear upon the Koran that it was the result of an accident over which he had no control ; in vain, we say ; for the pitiless Sirdir had him burned alive ; and he is alleged to have tortured to death more than one British officer, whom the fortune of war had left in his hands.

Ackbar, however, excelled in all the higher branches of Afghan education ; thus he rode well, shot with precision, and handled his sabre with an expertness few could equal.

"Some conspiracy is afoot," thought Denzil ; "and there is Shireen Khan, the old Kussilbash brute whom I saw airing himself on a camel at the band-stand ; and now, here comes my friend, the Arab Hadji, who loves his Prophet so much, but loathes soap and water more," he added, mentally, as his late tormentor now stole in, and creeping, almost crawling, on his hands and knees, up to Ackbar, delivered a letter, which he drew from his tattered cummerbund, the cloth which girt his loins.

Ackbar read it, and his eyes flashed fire as he turned to grim old Shireen Khan, and said,—

"Sale, the Kaffir Sirdir (*i.e.*, infidel general) has actually cut his way through the Ghilzie tribes, and is now safe in Jellabad ! Well, the unbelievers who remain in Cabul shall be destroyed, root and branch, ere he can return to succour them ; that I have sworn on the Kulma, unless the Envoy of their Queen ransoms their accursed heads to-morrow."

"And their women shall be our slaves," said one.

"Or exchanged for horses with the chiefs of Toorkistan," added another.

Then, said Shireen Khan, his eyes, too, blazing like carbuncles, as the hatred of race and religion boiled up within him,

"The Feringhees, those dogs of covetousness, are among us, and for what ? What seek they here ? To put over us a king whom we loathe—a king who will be subservient to the Lord Bahadar at Calcutta ; dethroning Dost Mohammed !"

"Solomon, as we may read, knew three thousand proverbs, and the songs that he sang were a hundred and five ; yet what was Solomon when compared with Shah Sujah ?" sneered Ackbar, as his white teeth glistened under his coal-black moustache.

"You will ask this Envoy on the morrow, if it was really his intention to send me, Ameen Oollah Khan, Shireen Khan, and others, bound as slaves, to the feet of his Queen, in her Island of the Sea ?" said one with sombre fury.

"I shall, without fail."

"And the white-faced dog will deny it !"

"Perhaps ; but it shall be the last lie of the unbeliever's tongue," replied Ackbar, with a grim smile as he touched the hilt of his Afghan dagger.

"Slay him, even as I slew Burnes Sahib !" added that pleasant personage who rejoiced in the name of Ameen Oollah Khan.

"Ha ! what said the Khan of Khelat-i-Ghilzie to him, when he

heard of the Feringhees first coming hither by the Khyber and the Khoord Cabul passes? ‘Ye have brought an army into the land of the Pushtaneh; but how do you propose to take it back again?’”*

“Had we killed Burnes Sahib when first he came among us alone, he had not returned with all those Kaffirs who are now cantoned between yonder hills of Siah Sung and Bchmaru,” said another chief, who wore the sword of Sir Alexander Burnes in his girdle; “so now, that we have the opportunity, let us slay the dogs ere they can escape us.”

“Nay, let us get the ransom *first*,” suggested Shireen Khan.

“Yes; and then let them march and be in the passes, we know by which they must depart; and remember,” added Ackbar, with a tone and face of indescribable ferocity, “the old Arab proverb—*Al harbu Khudatun!*”—(All war is fraud).

“Moreover,” said Ameen Oollah, “the Prophet tells us, that promise as we may, no faith is to be kept with heretics.”

“I came to retake my father’s rights; the rights he sold to the Feringhees. It was written that I should do so; for who that could sit on a lofty throne in yonder Bala Hissar, would content him with a carpet in a tent? Those Feringhees—those Anglo-Indians are the most presumptuous dogs in the world,” continued Ackbar, “they are accustomed to see their servile sipahies, their effeminate Hindoos, and others cower before them; but did they expect the same homage from us—the free men of Afghanistan?”

A fierce laugh answered the question, and those who had lances, made their iron-shod butts to crash on the marble floor.

Much more to the same purpose passed. Many of the arguments used and impulses given, were nearly the same as those which excited the terrible mutiny of a subsequent year; but what plan those conspirators meant to adopt—whether to take a bribe, and let our troops retreat in peace; or take the bribe, and lure them to destruction in those terrible passes by which alone they could return to India; in either case, to make slaves of the white women, neither Mohammed, who translated much of what we have written, nor the other listener, could determine; but the farewell words of Ackbar, ere they departed, were ominous of much evil to come.

“To your castles and tents,” said he; “let every Khan and tribe be prepared, for to-morrow may determine all. You, Shireen Khan, shall dispatch tchoppers† to the chiefs of the Ghilzies,

* * These were almost the words of the Duke of Wellington (by a singular coincidence) when intimation was first made in Parliament of our advance into Afghanistan.—Macfarlane’s *Hist. of British India*, p. 537.

† Mounted couriers.

and those of the Khyberrees, to guard the passes to the death, promise what we may—for remember *all war is fraud!*”

With a low salaam to Ackbar, after all turning their faces in the direction of Mecca, they now separated, and in a few minutes, the sound of their horses’ hoofs died away, some in the direction of the city, and others on the Candahar road.

“Sahib,” said Mohammed Khan, greatly disturbed, “you have heard?”

“More than I quite understand,” replied Denzil; “however, I shall report the affair to the General in the morning; those fellows are evidently up to something more than either he or the Envoy quite calculate upon. I only wish that I were nearer my quarters.”

“I have promised to guide you.”

“Thanks, Khan; you are most kind.”

All around the tomb and mosque of Baber was still and silent again; the cooing of the pigeons and the gurgle of the sacred fountain alone were heard. The quiet stars, and their queen, the vast round silver moon, were shining now in peace and calmness over Cabul; over city, plain, and flowing river; and in floods of liquid light, the picturesque towers and masses of the Bala Hissar stood forth pale and grey, while the curtain walls between, were sunk in shadow or obscurity.

Glad to befriend in any way an English officer, the Wuzeer guided Denzil between the Armenian and the Mussulman burying-grounds, where the shadows of the tall and ghost-like cypresses fell on the white headstones and the little square chambers or cupolas that covered the graves of those of rank.

“Listen,” said Denzil, pausing, as he suspected the Arab Hadji might still be following; “surely I hear a sound.”

“You hear only the night wind sighing through yonder cypresses,” replied Taj Mohammed, solemnly; “sadly it goes past us bearing some weary soul, perhaps, to the bridge of Al-sirat—some soul whose earthly tabernacle may yet lie there, where five of my children are laid, each with its fair face turned towards Mecca.”

Paler and sad grew the face of the Wuzeer as he spoke, for the Afghans greatly reverence all burial-places, which, in their own language, they term “the cities of the silent;” and in fancy they love to people with the ghosts of the departed, sitting each unseen at the head of his or her own grave, enjoying the fragrance of the wreaths and garlands hung there by sorrowing relatives.

Almost in the centre of the plain, midway between where the burial-grounds lie and where the cantonments were, flowed the Cabul river: and a mile or two brought Denzil and his guide

within hail of an advanced picquet of the 54th Native Infantry, now posted at the bridge. There the former was safe, and with many expressions of thanks and gratitude, he parted from the Wuzeer.

He was informed by the officer in command of the post, that spies had told the General of Ackbar Khan being in the vicinity of the city ; and that in consequence, all European residents had been ordered to repair for safety, within the shelter of the cantonments.

White in the moonbeams he could see the walls of General Trecarrel's villa, which, being under the guns of our fortified Camp was, as yet pretty safe ; and he looked towards it with such emotion as a lover who is young and ardent, alone can feel; for Rose he knew was there ; and after all he had heard at the Mosque of Baber, his heart swelled with anxiety, and a longing desire that she and Mabel, and all their friends, were elsewhere, in some place of greater peace and security.

"To-morrow I shall tell her of my narrow escape," thought he ; "my darling—my darling—how I love you ! and how nearly you were losing me !"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"ONLY AN ENSIGN."

PROVIDENTIALLY for us, none in this world know what a day, or even an hour may bring forth ; so Denzil, when next morning he dressed and accoutred himself, could little foresee the many stirring events that were to crowd the next twelve hours, and in which he was to bear a part ; as little could he foresee the sorrows that were in store for him, ere for the last time, as the event proved, he laid his head on the pillow in the Afghān fort ; for next day was to see the whole forces concentrated in the cantonments. Polwheel was absent on patrol duty, and Bob Waller had gone abroad unusually early.

Denzil's intense longing to see Rose Trecarrel and to revive the memories of yesterday was mingled with a conviction of the necessity to see her father, that he might take him to General Elphinstone or the envoy, to whom he was most anxious to report all that he had heard and seen overnight in the Mosque of Baber ; but Trecarrel was absent (as a sepoy on duty at the gate of the villa informed him), having gone to the Bala Hissar with a strong cavalry escort, as the turbulence of the people rendered all the roads and streets unsafe—a state of affairs sufficiently proved to Denzil already.

He recalled the threat, or proposal he had overheard, to sell the European ladies as slaves in Toorkistan, or to exchange them for horses ;—Rose Trecarrel sent to Toorkistan ! He felt that he could cheerfully shed his heart's blood in defence of her —of Mabel and the old General too ; that he could die for them—for her more than all ; and all that a young, loving and enthusiastic spirit could suggest were in his head and heart, with a hope that his narrow escape overnight would invest him with additional interest in her estimation.

He entered the house with somewhat of the confidence felt only by a privileged dangler, and by chance on this occasion his arrival was *not* proclaimed by a stroke on the gong. He gave his name to a native servant of the Trecarrels, who ushered him into the drawing-room, announcing his presence as "Deveroo Sahib," but in a tone so low that it seemed to be unheard by those who were there, and for a full minute Denzil stood irresolute and did not advance.

The apartment was spacious, and at a remote end of it, almost out on the verandah, in fact, were Bob Waller and Mabel Trecarrel, very much occupied with each other. She was seated in an easy chair looking up at him, with an arch yet confident expression. They were conversing in whispers, while Waller leaned over her, stooping his tall and handsome figure so much that his face was close to hers—so close, indeed, that his long curly whisker, the left one, was caught by her right-ear ear-ring, from which it was with difficulty extricated.

"Do you know what I've been thinking, Mabel ?" asked Waller, at that juncture.

"How should I guess ?"

"Try."

"What is it ?"

"How have I ever been able to get on for those seven-and-twenty years—I am just twenty-seven—without you !"

Denzil might have laughed at all this but for the other two, who made up a quartette.

Nearer him in the foreground sat Rose, the glory of the morning sun streaming full upon her, and imparting fresh radiance to her beauty. Her rich auburn hair glittered in the sheen, half like gold and half like dusky bronze, while her smiling eyes were full of liquid light as she looked upward from a book of coloured prints which lay open on her knee, to the face of a staff officer who hung somewhat familiarly over her. His face was fine, well browned by the sun, and closely shaven, all save a smart black moustache ; his eyes were soft in expression, and his whole air was decidedly distinguished.

"Now, who the deuce is this fellow ? who seems such an *ami*

de la maison—in staff uniform, too—never saw his face before,” were the surmises that flashed on Denzil’s mind.

“And what is all this Miss Trecarrel has told me?” asked the stranger, in a low voice.

“A foolish flirtation with a boy,” replied Rose, laughing. “It was all a joke. Be assured that he never asked me to favour him with my agreeable society for the term of his natural life.”

“By Jove! I should think not,” was the rather dubious response of the visitor.

“And some bread-and-butter Miss now a-bed, perhaps, in England will console him in the future, if the memory of me survive so long.”

“Mabel says you are over head and ears in love with him.”

“Psha! how can *you* talk so? I am out of my teens, and the time has gone by for me falling over head and ears for anybody. Come, don’t be foolish, friend Audley,” she continued, gazing into the same eyes which looked so softly into those of Sybil by the lonely moorland tarn. “Do you think,” she added, laughing, “I have been writing ‘*Mrs. and Ensign Devereaux*’ in my blotting-pad, just to see how the conjunction looked; for Denzil, you know, poor fellow, is very young and *only an ensign*.”

Denzil felt as if petrified; and but last night he had risked his life to procure a bauble for her!

“But you certainly have been letting him make love to *you*,” resumed the stranger, in a tone of combined reproof and banter.

“Well, it is rather pleasant to have a nice foolish boy to make love to one, to tease and to laugh at.”

“Oh, indeed!” His tone was almost contemptuous; but in her vanity Rose failed to perceive this.

It was not eavesdropping, hearing all this, which passed rapidly, for the Hindoo had formally announced Denzil; but so absorbed were the quartette in themselves that they neither saw nor heard him. Then as he paused irresolutely with cap and pipe-clayed gloves in hand, he heard more than certainly even Rose, in her most rantipole mood, ever meant he should hear. To say truth, she had been grievously piqued that Audley had come out overland, instead of with her and Mabel in the Indian-man; and hence she was disposed to exert the full power of her charms, and use all her arts to lure him into flirting with—if not of absolutely loving—her; and for the time poor Denzil seemed to be already forgotten, or only remembered as a subject for merriment.

But as yet, at least, Audley Trevelyan was proof against all her wiles and smiles. He thought only of the little girl at home

now—she whose brother he was certain might abhor and shun him for his somewhat selfish treatment of her ; for he knew not that Denzil had heard nothing of the little love scenes that had passed at Porthellick.

Suddenly Denzil caught the eye of Rose as he drew nearer, and starting and growing rather pale in the fear of what he might have heard, she exclaimed, nervously—

“ Oh ! Mr. Devereaux, welcome ! Allow me to introduce you —Mr. Devereaux, Cornish Light Infantry,—Mr. Trevelyan, one of yours, just arrived—papa’s new aide-de-camp, you know.”

Denzil bowed with anything but a satisfied air to “ papa’s new aide-de-camp,” who presented his hand with more than polite cordiality, and muttered something about “ the sincere pleasure” it gave him, et cetera.

“ Hallo, Denzil, my boy ! what was that shindy we hear you got into in Cabul last night ? ” asked Waller, looking up. “ Hope you were not poking your nose under the veil of some bride of the Faithful, eh ? Here is Trevelyan of ours, has had a narrow escape, too. He and his escort were pursued by the Ghilzies as he came up country ; but he sabred one, shot five or six, and got clear off. Then I suppose you know all about this devilish business of Sale and the 13th Light Infantry in the pass ? ”

Waller running on thus, caused a diversion, and saved both Rose and Denzil some pain by giving them breathing time.

So this was Audley Trevelyan, his cousin, *the* Audley to whom Sybil owed her life in the Pixies’ Hole, was the first thought of Denzil, and his heart seemed to harden. He had come thinking to create an interest in a very tender bosom by an account of “ the shindy,” as Waller styled it, in the great bazaar ; and here was a fellow bronzed and moustachioed already in possession of the situation—master of the position—an intensely good-looking beast, who had actually crossed swords and exchanged shots with the wild and untamable Ghilzies !

To Denzil it was bitter mortification, all—yet he was compelled to dissemble. Could it be possible that he found himself *de trop* ? That words of mockery had fallen on his ear ? That Mabel and this man, too, knew alike of that delightful drive by the lake ?

There was a nervous flutter and laughing air of confusion about Rose that were neither flattering nor assuring ; but the confirmed tidings of the attack, by the insurrectionary tribes upon Sir Robert Sale’s regiment in its downward march to Jella-labad, luckily afforded a ready topic—a neutral ground—on which all could talk with ease ; for now they were aware that Sir Robert Sale’s little brigade, including the Queen’s 13th Light Infantry and 35th Native Infantry, armed with flint muskets,

though the stores were full of percussion fire-arms, had been attacked by the mountain tribes, and that after clearing the stupendous Khoord Cabul pass and enduring eighteen days of incessant fighting as far as a place called Gundamuck, had succeeded in reaching Jellalabad on the 12th of November ; and that now on Sir Robert's retention of that city depended all the hope of General Elphinstone's slender army having a place of refuge—a point on which to fall back—if compelled to retire from Cabul (leaving the unpopular Shah to the mercy of his own subjects), even with the knowledge that a great amount of fighting awaited them in the savage mountain passes (through which their homeward route must lie), amid the land of the Ghilzies, a race of hereditary robbers.

Many officers and men had been killed and wounded ; among the latter were Sir Robert Sale, who received a ball in his left leg, and Lieutenant O'Brien, of the 13th, whose skull was fractured by a shot as he attempted to storm the rocks at the head of his company. Such was the story of that protracted fight as it reached Cabul, and reference to it now shed somewhat of gravity over even the lively Rose Trecarrel ; for among the officers of the two regiments attacked—especially of the dashing 13th, Prince Albert's Own Light Infantry—many were known to her, and had deemed her the chief attraction of the band-stand and the daily promenade.

But regrets were short, for something of the off-hand recklessness to danger and even death, incident to military society in such a place as Cabul, pervaded even the tenor of female life there ; and the subject was soon dismissed.

"A mounted *tchopper* accompanied Mr. Audley," said Mabel to Denzil, whose saddened face interested her ; "and so we have had quite a bale of newspapers from England."

"A bale?" repeated Denzil, mechanically, his eyes seeking those of Rose.

"Yes, positively. Three months' newspapers at least, though not one letter ; and thus the obituaries and marriages in the *Times* become so perplexing to us here."

"I brought some letters for the army up with me from Bombay," said Audley Trevelyan, "and among them, Devereaux, I observed one for you—the name had, somehow, an attraction for me."

"From home!" exclaimed Denzil, starting, for only those who are so far from Europe as he was then can know how much is concentrated in that single word "home."

"I trust so."

"Then I must go to my quarters at once."

"Nay, Devereaux," said Waller, "moderate your impatience, if the letter is from some fair one—"

"I have no correspondent but my—my sister Sybil," said Denzil, with a flash in his eyes and a quiver of the lip.

"But you *must* wait, my good fellow," said Waller, patting him kindly on the shoulder; "you remember that we promised to ride on the Staff of the Envoy, to make up a gallant show, and to impress, if possible, the Sirdir."

"My horse is not here."

"But mine is, and is quite at your service," said Audley, bowing to Denzil, who was in an agony of impatience to peruse his long-wished-for letter.

"All right," added Waller, looking at his watch; "and now we must be off—must tear ourselves away."

He glanced smilingly to Mabel as he spoke.

A strange footing the two kinsmen were on. Something in their hearts kept each from talking of their being such to each other. It was indignant disdain on the part of Denzil, with somewhat of jealousy, too. In Audley it was a well-bred nervous doubt of how much or how little Denzil knew of the love affair—the broken engagement, in fact, with his sister; or the misconstruction of the last visit at night—the visit which ended, as neither yet knew, by an effect so fatal. Denzil thanked him briefly and emphatically for saving his sister's life (the Trecarrels had fully detailed all that), and then all reference to Porthellick, and even to Cornwall, was dropped; but they had soon other things to think of.

The father of Audley had left nothing unsaid or undone to impress upon him that the mysterious story of Constance's marriage was a fabrication—one calculated to injure the prospects, and imperil the honour, and so forth of the Trevelyan family; but when Audley remembered Sybil, and sought to trace a likeness to her in Denzil's face, he could not help feeling kindly and well disposed to his younger brother officer.

Denzil having no such tender reminiscences to soften him, was disposed to be politely cool or grim as Ajax.

"We must get our bonnets and shawls if we are to see this Conference," said Rose; and we must look sharp—*temp-s-militaire*, you no."

"Don't be slangy," said Mabel.

"Do you call French so, Mab?" Rose asked, as they hastened in high spirits to attire themselves for walking, and little anticipating the scene that was before them.

"What are you thinking of Waller?" asked Audley, smiling.

"That a thousand girls may be beautiful; but only one among them have an air of refinement."

"Like Miss Trecarrel?"

"Exactly."

All Europeans had now been ordered to keep within the shelter of the cantonments, and as it was feared that the General's house might not be sufficiently protected by the guns on the bastions overlooking the Residency, he had [arranged for the removal of his whole family and effects into the regimental bungalow ; and already a fatigue party under Sergeant Treherne was at work on the premises, pulling down and packing up as only soldiers can pack and prepare in haste.

With something of a stunned emotion Denzil rode by the side of Waller on the horse of Audley, as the latter preferred to accompany the ladies who were to witness the Conference through their lorgnettes from the cantonment walls.

"Oh ! he preferred remaining behind," thought Denzil viciously ; "preferred remaining with *her*, of course ; what cares he about the Envoy, the Sirdir, or the Conference, d—n him !"

"Full uniform is the order, you see," said Waller, as three other officers joined them ; "we are to meet Ackbar in our war-paint—in all the pomp and glorious circumstance——"

"Oh ! Waller, urged Denzil ; "how can you chaff so ?"

"Why not ; it is a poor heart that never rejoices. You are down in your luck with Rose, but you will laugh at that by-and-by."

Denzil coloured, but made no reply. Oh, had his ears deceived him ? Had he heard aright ? Had he been bantered by the tongue that spoke so alluringly yesterday, mocked by the lips that had been pressed to his so passionately ? Were the clear bright hazel eyes that but lately looked so earnest, now smiling as they alone could smile, into those of another ?

Might he not have been mistaken ? he tormentingly asked himself again and again, and she be true after all—yes, after the sweet impassioned hours of joy by the Lake of Istaliff it must be so ! He actually began to flatter himself that this was the case ; that all was as he wished it to be ; so true it is "that a man freshly in love is more blind than the bats at noonday."

So far as change of scene, of circumstance, of society, and some kinds of experience went, Denzil was beginning to learn the truth of Southeys maxim, "Live as long as you may, the first twenty years are the longest of your life."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ASSASSINATION.

NO special correspondent had ever, or has ever, penetrated beyond the Indus and into the wilds of Kohistan, to saturate the English papers with narratives of the terrible scenes which we are about to describe in some of these pages.

Leaving the cantonments by the centre gate which faced the hills of Siah Sung, Denzil, Waller, and the officers who had joined them, Captains Mackenzie, Lawrence, and Trevor, now rode to where a group of others surrounded one on horseback, who proved to be the Envoy, who had with him a Hindoo syce, or groom, leading a marvellously beautiful Arab horse, which he meant to present in our Queen's name to the Sirdir. With all his avowed confidence in the latter, he had requested that, in case of any unforeseen emergency arising, the 54th Native Infantry, the Shah's 6th regiment and two field pieces should be in readiness for instant service; but so greatly was General Elphinstone debilitated, alike in mind and body, that no order to this effect was issued; so the men remained idle in their bungalows, though it was known that the cowardly Shah Sujah, who had eight hundred ladies, the flower of all his country, shut up with him in the Bala Hissar, was so apprehensive of the result of the meeting, that he coolly sent orders through his Kadun Kahia (or Mother of the Maids) placed in authority over them, that they should, if the rebels under Ackbar got into the city, be each and all prepared to take a deadly poison within an hour.

"Look alive, Denzil—waken up; here is the representative of Her Britannic Majesty in this pleasant part of the world," said Waller to his abstracted friend, while laughing and saluting he approached Sir William Macnaghten, Baronet, who, for his great political services, had just been appointed Governor of Bombay, and who was in full diplomatic uniform, elaborately laced with silver embroidery, and had several jewelled orders glittering on his breast.

Like many men whom a perilous adventure or a sudden fate menaces, he was in excellent spirits this morning, and was by no means disposed to listen to the warnings of the solemn-visaged Wuzeer, who was relating all that he and Denzil had overheard in the Mosque of Baber. Captain Mackenzie also stated that there was certainly a plot laid by Ackbar for his destruction; but Macnaghten would listen to neither advice nor remonstrance.

"I must meet him," said he, "and already he and the chiefs are on the ground to consult about whether we shall remain here

in peace or retire beyond the Inus ; and you will see how I shall snub even such a fellow as Ackbar Khan," he added, lifting his cocked hat and bowing gracefully to the ladies who were gathering in numbers above the rampart of the Siah Sung gate, and all were busy with their opera-glasses, looking towards the east bank of the Cabul river, where, about a quarter of a mile distant, were clustered a group of Afghan horsemen, their brightly coloured flowing dresses and burnished weapons making a brilliant show in the sunshine.

In common with Captain Lawrence and Captain Trevor of the 3rd Light Cavalry, Waller begged the Envoy to consider well these repeated warnings, but the latter only laughed and said,

" Bold as he is—and even in this wild country there is none perhaps bolder—Ackbar dare not molest me."

" Be not over confident, Sir William : remember his remorseless character, and the homicides he has committed."

" I have my pistols."

" So have we all ; but consider your wife—consider Lady Macnaghten, if you perish as Sir Alexander Burnes perished !"

Macnaghten's lip quivered slightly, and he glanced to where the row of fair English faces, the flutter of ribbons, veils, and gay bonnets, were all visible above the dark slope of the cantonment wall ; but he concealed his rising emotion or anxiety by an angry outburst.

" I do not ask *you*, Captain Waller, to accompany me ; MacKenzie, Lawrence, and Trevor are enough to be in front of the lines, if you think the risk so great."

Waller's open and ruddy countenance lowered and grew pale.

" Risk, Sir William !" said he, greatly ruffled, " of course there is risk, otherwise I should not be here as a volunteer."

" Nor I," added Denzil, glancing towards a certain blue crape bonnet, and detecting Audley's cocked hat very close thereby.

" Nor I," exclaimed the black-whiskered Polwhele, who had hitherto been intent on the points of the Arab courser.

" Come on then, gentlemen—the more the merrier, and a little time must solve all."

The Wuzeer sadly shook his head, and saying,

" As Darrah said of the hypocrite Aurungzebe, ' Of all my brothers most do I fear the teller of beads,' so say I of Ackbar ;" and almost rending his beard as he went, this loyal minister of a most unpopular king retired into one of the forts to wait the event, while the Envoy laughingly spurred his horse and with his companions rode towards the group of Afghan Chiefs, around and in the rear of whom their armed followers were every moment increasing in number and excitement, as fresh horsemen accouched with spear and shield, matchlock and sabre, came galloping

from the gates of the city, uttering menacing and tumultuous cries, which could not fail to make the hearts of the ladies in the fortified camp to throb with apprehension.

The Envoy, with his little Staff, after crossing the canal by the bridge near an old and abandoned fort, advanced more leisurely towards where Mohammed Ackbar Khan, and many other great Chiefs, among whom were Shireen Khan of the Kussilbashes, on his towering camel, and Ameen Oollah Khan, were posted a little way in front of an armed, dark-visaged, and stormy-looking throng.

The last-named individual, Chief of Logur, perhaps equalled Ackbar in cruelty ; and it may be sufficient to illustrate his character to state, that in order to get rid of an elder brother who stood between him and the inheritance, he caused him to be seized and buried up to the chin in densely packed earth. Around his neck was then looped a rope, the end of which was haltered to a wild horse, which was driven round him in a circle, until the unhappy victim's head was torn from his shoulders, as a testimony of how Ameen Oollah Khan protested against the law of primogeniture.*

Conspicuous among all by his stature and deportment, the Prince Ackbar was magnificently attired in a camise of shawl pattern, all scarlet and gold ; his plumed cap was of blue and gold brocade, with a fall and fringe that drooped on his right shoulder. He was armed only with his sabre, a poniard, and a pair of magnificent pistols, which Sir William Macnaghten had presented to him on a former occasion ; but Ameen Oollah Khan, Shireen, the Kussilbash, the other chiefs, and all their followers, especially the Ghilzies, were accounted to the teeth, with the arms usually borne by Afghan horsemen—a heavy matchlock with a long bayonet, a sabre, a blunderbuss, three long pistols, a dagger, four or five knives, a shield on the back, and a comical complication of bullet-bags, powder-flasks, priming-horns, and other things dangling at their girdles ; and warlike, ferocious, and formidable-looking fellows they were, save their firearms, unchanged in aspect and in nature as their forefathers who dwelt on the mountains of Ghore, in the days when the Scots and English were breaking each other's heads on the field of Northallerton.

It was a strange scene, and picturesque in all its details.

On one side a few fair-faced English officers in full uniform, with glass in eye and cigarette in mouth, cool, quiet, and secretly rather disposed to "chaff the niggers"—men of that type of whom Bob Waller might be taken as the representative, frank, fearless,

* Lieutenant Eyre's Narrative.

and light-hearted, with his honest blue eyes and those long, fair whiskers which Mabel Trecarrel thought so adorable—quite as much so as he deemed her tresses of ruddy, golden auburn ; on the other, a horde of those hardy warriors from the hills of Kohistan—men whose ideas were beyond the middle ages of the world's history, with their hearts full of proud disdain, rancorous hate, and all the malignant treachery that adversity of race, religious fanaticism, and profound ignorance can inspire, and yet suavely dissembling for the time.

" Permit me, Khan, to present you with this horse, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen of England, with her wishes that you may long be spared to ride him," said Sir William Macnaghten, with a profound salaam, after he and his companions drew close to the carpet on which Ackbar awaited them. He then alighted from his horse and seated himself, together with Captains Trevor, Lawrence, and Mackenzie, upon a piece of carpet, among the chiefs and sirdirs ; but, luckily for themselves, Waller, Denzil, and the rest remained in their saddles, at a little distance. The Sirdir coldly and haughtily thanked the Envoy for his new gift, the points of which he praised with all a horseman's perception. It cost Sir William 3000 rupees, and had belonged to Captain Grant, the Assistant Adjutant-General. Then with an eye to any confusion that might ensue during the Conference, he ordered the Hindoo syce to lead it off at once towards the city, and a sly, cruel gleam came into his black eyes, as this was done. After a few solemn salutations in oriental fashion and phraseology, Ackbar Khan said—

" Bismillah ! let us talk."

All the chapters in the Koran, except nine, commence with this word, which signifies, " In the name of the merciful God ;" thus it is incessantly used in conversation by the Arabs, and still more by the somewhat canting Afghans.

He then proceeded to business at once, by asking the Envoy if he was prepared to effect a proposition that had before been made, to the effect that we should deliver up the Shah Sujah, with all his household and family, male and female, to his—the Sirdir's—mercy ; that we should lay down our arms and colours, yielding also cannon and horses, together with those two obnoxious sahibs, Sir Robert Sale and Brigadier Shelton, as hostages—in fact, an unconditional surrender—in virtue of which he should graciously pardon our appearance in Afghanistan, our interference with its affairs, and permit our whole force to retire with their lives, on the further condition of swearing to return no more !

" Such proposals," said Sir William, endeavouring to preserve his temper, " are too dishonourable for British troops to enter-

tain. You know not, Sirdir, the men you speak to, and if you persist——”

“Ah, if we persist, what then?”

“We shall simply appeal to arms.”

“You Feringhees are proud,” said Ackbar, scoffingly ; “but Allah punishes the proud and humbles them.”

He breathed hard as he spoke, and the splendid jewels on his breast heaved with each excited respiration as he strove to restrain his fiery temper ; but his dark eyes sparkled, and his teeth glistened like those of a wild animal.

“I have to lament, Khan,” resumed Sir William, “that relations of friendship which have hitherto existed between your people and us have been clouded ; and I am ignorant wherefore it should be so. Good-will towards the people of Afghanistan caused my mistress, the Queen of England, to lend her aid——”

“In dethroning my father, Dost Mohammed Khan,” interrupted Ackbar, with sombre fury.

“In restoring Shah Sujah to the throne of his ancestors,” continued Macnaghten, heedless of the pointed interruption ; “and now, Khan, I beseech you to remember that I received your royal father’s sword at yonder gate of Cabul, when he rode in, a hunted fugitive, after his escape from the Emir of Bokhara, and I saved his life, sending him with all honour to Calcutta, when I might have slain him.”

“I have not forgotten it, Kaffir, and would rather you had cut him to pieces, than made him a dependent on your bounty.”

Sir William took no heed either of the injurious epithet or the prince’s somewhat unfilial wish.

“The paths of the just are rugged like yonder hills of Kohistan ; yet the snowy peaks are nearer Allah than the plain around us,” said Ackbar, in true Afghan phraseology.

“I know that, Khan ; but——”

“Peace ! You Kassirs pretend to know all things, whereas ye know nothing. How can it be else, when ye know not the blessed Koran ? You can be grasping and cruel, however, and well know how to be so. Was it not your secret intention to send Ameen Oollah Khan, Skireen Khan, and even me, chained, as slaves to your Queen, a Kaffir woman, in her little island, which, Abdallah the Hadji tells us, is a mere spot of mud amid a misty sea ?”

“It was a lie of the Ghilzie chiefs,” replied Sir William, becoming uneasy at the decidedly offensive tone so rapidly assumed by the Khan.

“There is but one God, and before Him none other did exist,” resumed the royal hypocrite ; “He formed seven heavens, seven worlds, and eighteen creations, and He sent his friend Mo-

hammed as the Prophet to mankind ; and by every hair in that Prophet's beard I swear to see you brought low—very low, and to exult over you."

"Perhaps so, Khan—you are younger than I," replied the other, affecting to misunderstand the ominous threat.

"You will not accept our terms?"

"It is impossible ; as I have said, they are too dishonourable."

"Then, while the Khyberees guard the passes, we shall starve you in yonder cantonments, till the horse's gnaw each other's tails, and the tent-pegs too, for very hunger ; till the babe shall suck in vain for milk at its dying mother's breast, and the jackals and pariah dogs shall gorge themselves with the flesh of camels, of horses, and those who are lower yet than even the beasts of the fields—the accursed of the Prophet!"

Ere Macnaghten could reply to this remarkable outburst, an officer (Captain Lawrence) drew near, and called his attention to the great number of armed men who had been gradually stealing in between them and the gate of the cantonments, and suggested that they "should be ordered to withdraw."

"No," exclaimed Ackbar, starting to his feet ; "they are all in the secret ; *begeer ! begeer !*" (seize—seize).

At these words, as if they had been a given signal, the Envoy, Captains Trevor, Lawrence, and Mackenzie were seized by a crowd of Afghans, and were so completely taken by surprise, that their swords, pistols, and epaulets were torn from them before they could strike a blow in their own defence.

With an expression of indescribable ferocity in his dark face, Ackbar grasped Sir William with his own hand, and proceeded to drag him violently and by main strength down a bank towards the Cabul river.

"Ah ! Kaffir," said he, tauntingly, "you think to take my country, do you?"

"For God's sake, beware !" exclaimed the unfortunate man, making all the resistance that rage, just indignation, and fear of a sudden death, such as that endured by his friend Burnes, would inspire ; so finding it impossible to carry him off, Ackbar shot him dead with one of the beautiful pistols, a present from his victim ; and ere the corpse touched the ground it was impaled by a hundred swords and bayonets. The head was then hewn off and upheld by the hair.

Captain Trevor, of the 3rd Bengal Cavalry, also fell, the victim of innumerable wounds. Mackenzie and Lawrence were borne off towards the city by one horde of fanatics, while another, led by Ameen Oollah Khan, with juzails cocked and swords drawn, and with flashing eyes and infuriated faces and gestures, uttering screams of "Kaffirs—Ferringhees—Sugs !" (infidels—

Europeans—dogs), rushed upon Waller, Denzil, Polwhele, and two other officers, who could hear the shrill cries of dismay uttered by the ladies on the wall of the cantonments, where now, when it was too late, old Elphinstone had ordered the drums to beat to arms, and General Trecarrel brought the cavalry, half-saddled, from their stables.

"Stick close to me, Devereaux," cried Waller, shortening his reins and raising himself in his stirrups. He escaped two Juzail balls, and parried a most vicious poke of a lance made at him by Shireen Khan; and then by one tremendous blow, which, however, fell harmlessly on the thick folds of the loonghee or scarlet cap of that personage, he tumbled him from his perch on the camel's hump. The next blow he gave rid Denzil of Abdallah, the Arab Hadji, who, shouting "Mohammed resoul Allah!" had actually sprung with all the fierce activity of a tree-tiger, upon his horse's crupper, and was about to plunge an Afghan dagger—a formidable weapon, as it is twenty-four inches in length, broader than a sword-blade, and sharp as a razor—into his back or throat; it only grazed his neck, however, when Waller's sword, with all the impetus that strength of arm and speed of horse could give it, was through and through the body of the savage fanatic.

"There is another nigger sent to the other end of nowhere," cried Waller. "Dash right through them, gentlemen; we must cut for our lives!"

Riding close together and abreast, the five officers, making a charge right through the mob (who were chiefly Ghilzees, and who, in their blind fury, wrath, and confusion, wounded and shot each other), succeeded by hard riding in reaching the cantonments, the gates of which were instantly closed and barricaded.

Polwhele left his sword in one man's body, so firmly was it wedged in the spinal column. Waller's sword was only one of the rubbishy regulation blades of Sheffield, a poor weapon when opposed to the keenly tempered sabres of those Afghaan warriors, yet towering over them all, his bulk, strength, and stature had availed him greatly; he had shot two, and cut down thre. Denzil, though half stunned by confusion at the suddenness of the whole affair, and by the explosion of a matchlock close to his face, struck about manfully, and must have sent at least one Mussulman on his way to the dark-eyed girls of paradise; for when he dismounted, breathless and excited, within the gates, he found his sword and right hand both covered with blood.

In the exasperation of his mind at Rose Trecarrel, the tumult of the time was a relief to Denzil's mind; and he was not sorry that she, through her lorgnette, had seen him, sword in hand, among the Afghans.

On this conflict the poor ladies had gazed, with faces paled by terror, and lips that were mute, save when a shriek escaped them involuntarily as blood spirted upward in the air, as a man or horse went down, yet they gazed with the strange fascination that the ferocity of a conflict between men—more than all armed men—will sometimes have for the gentlest woman, for it seemed a species of wild phantasmagoria. But they wrung their hands and wept piteously ; for they saw the terrible butchery of Sir William Macnaghten and of Captain Trevor, and could only tremble for the too-probable fate of Captain Lawrence and Captain Mackenzie, who, in sight of the entire troops in the cantonment, and in sight of all their friends, were borne off captives amid a yelling horde, whose weapons, spear-heads, crooked sabres, and polished horse-shoes, flashed out brightly from amid a cloud of dust that rolled away towards the Lahore Gate of the now-hostile city of Cabul.

"Well, this is a shindy that will suffice to scare our blue devils for awhile," said Polwhele, with a grim smile on his dark face.

"Denzil, my boy," said Waller, "you had a narrow squeak for your life ; that Arab wasp's dagger was pretty close."

"I have no words to thank you," replied Denzil, breathlessly, and turning away somewhat bluntly from Audley Trevelyan, who frankly came to shake his hand in token of congratulation ; for their escape was almost miraculous—without wounds, too.

Lady Sale was thanking Heaven that her husband was safe in Jellalabad, and Mabel Trecarrel made a pretty plain *exposé* of what *her* emotions were on beholding Waller safe.

"Mr. Devereaux," said a voice that made his heart thrill—"Denzil, thank God you have escaped ! But, Heavens, your hands are all over blood ; it is horrible !"

There was infinite tenderness in the tone of Rose. It is the slavery of great love to be ever very humble. The lad blessed her in his heart ; yet her honeyed accents, though they recalled the joy of yesterday, could not remove the sting of that morning's mockery which still was sore and rankling.

"Poor Trevor, and all the rest, God help them !" exclaimed General Trecarrel, and many others, who had no hope now save in vengeance ; but, ere nightfall, Taj Mohammed stole into the cantonments with some final tidings.

The body of Sir William, who was a brave, good, and highly accomplished gentleman, had been ignominiously stripped and hung, with all its gaping wounds, in the Char Chouk, or Great Bazaar, where Denzil had so nearly lost his life ; and the head was taken by a khan, named Nawab Zuman, and, together with one of the hands, exhibited with ferocious triumph to Captain Conolly, an officer who had unfortunately fallen into their power,

and whose brother, with Major Stoddart, afterwards perished miserably under torture in the dungeons of the Emir of Bokhara.

The other two officers were detained as prisoners by Ackbar Khan. General Trecarrel, who had just come in from the Bala Hissar with an escort of the 5th Cavalry, was furious, and wished the cantonment to open with round shot, grape, and canister, on everything and everybody within their range ; but grave consideration was necessary now—our little force was so isolated in that hostile land.

At the time these events were occurring, the remains of Sir Alexander Burnes' body, cut in pieces, were still hanging on the trees of his garden as food for the vultures, and Ackbar Khan was driving in the Char Chouk, in the carriage of Sir William Macnaghten, whose head he hung there in a *bhoosa* bag (or forage-net) till it could be transmitted by a *tchopper*, or mounted messenger, to the Emir of Bokhara ; and the poor ladies in the cantonments looked at each other with blanched faces, as they heard of those terrible things.

So closed the night of the 23rd December over our troops in far-away Cabul.



CHAPTER XL.

HOME IN THE SPIRIT.

"AND now for my letter!" exclaimed Denzil, as he hurried eagerly from the excited throng about the cantonment gate to his new quarters, a bungalow of somewhat humble construction, as its low roof was thatched, and its walls built of the unburnt brick peculiar to Cabul. Save his bed and table, a chair, some bullock trunks, and accoutrements, furniture or ornament it had none.

The letter lay on the table, and, as he entered, its black-edged envelope gave him a shock. Audley had not mentioned this circumstance, for he humanely knew that, until the fatal conference was over, and Denzil could get it perused, his anxiety would be torture, as "the dim shadow of an unknown evil is worse than the presence of a calamity whose worst is told."

It proved to be from Sybil, and, curiously enough, had been brought from Bombay by Audley Trevelyan. In India, people when "up country" are thankful to get their home letters, even though six months old, and, in the joy of receiving one, the longing to learn all it contained—tidings of those he loved, and who were so far away—Denzil forgot the terrible double catastrophe

he had so recently witnessed—the cruel butchery of two gallant gentlemen ; he forgot even about Rose Trecarrel, and cast himself into his chair, to enjoy the full luxury of perusing it ; but for a time an envious film spread over his eyes when he attempted to read—a film that was soon to turn to tears.

"Ah ! England and Sybil," he murmured, "how far, far, I am away from you !"

The letter was dated some months back ; and the first few words gave the young military exile a dreadful shock, for they told him of his mother's death :—

"Oh, Denzil, my brother, how my heart yearns for you now more than ever ! You know how much she loved us, Denzil, and how much our lives were bound up in each other ; thus I cannot convince myself that I am quite alone, that she has gone from this world for ever, and that we shall never see her more—never see that sweet smile which her beautiful dark eyes always wore for us. Our darling mamma ! I send you a lock of her hair (you will see that grey had begun to mingle with it) ; and I send you also a wild violet that grew near the grave where I buried her."

Sybil's writing here became tremulous—almost illegible—and falling tears had evidently blotted the ink. The poor young subaltern seemed to forget his present surroundings ; he felt himself a boy again, and, covering his bowed-down face with his hands, wept bitterly.

"Time will soften what we suffer, Denzil ; but shall I ever be the same again ? I never had any plan or future unconnected with poor mamma after you left us, and our papa was lost. I fear she wore her life out with thinking of what would become of us—of me, perhaps, more especially—when she was, as she now is, dead and gone. There cannot be two beings more isolated than you and I are now, dear Denzil, and your letters are my only comfort. I am so thankful to find from them that you are a favourite with so many—that General Trecarrel is so kind ; and that honest fellow, Bob Waller, too, I feel that I quite love him. How do you like the Misses Trecarrel ? Rather giddy, are they not ? Has Mr. Audley Trevelyan joined yet ?"

Then, as if with the mention of Audley's name, other thoughts that were unknown to Denzil occurred to her, Sybil added :—

"My music and my sketching days are ended now, Denzil ; as some one has it, 'I may put away all the bright colours out of my paint-box, for they have gone out of my life.' Vainly has our rubicund Rector, fresh from his pretty parsonage, his happy family circle, as yet unbroken and unclouded by sorrow—fresh, perhaps, from his sumptuous luncheon and glass of full-bodied old port—besought me to take comfort—that grieving for the

dead was useless—and told me that there is One above ‘who turneith the shadow of death into mourning,’ for I can only weep as one who would not be comforted. The old man is very kind to me, however—bless him! though we have suffered much through that horrid Lamorna peerage story—much at the hands and tongues even of those to whom mamma was ever open-hearted, and all charity and benevolence; but you will remember what Lady Fanshawe says of our common Cornish folks in her time, that ‘they are of a crafty and censorious nature, *as most are so far from London.*’

“ My next letter will tell you more certainly of my future intentions, and all that immediately concerns myself. Our faithful nurse, Winny Braddon, whose brother perished with papa, has gone to spend—to end, I should say—her days with old Mike Treherne and his wife, who, as you know, is her sister; and the Rector, who takes care of me—for I am all but penniless now—is to give me an introduction to a lady of high rank, who is about to go abroad, to where I know not—to India itself, perhaps. Would to Heaven it were! for then we might meet again.”

“ My sister a companion—compelled, for bread, to submit to whim, caprice, neglect, and mortification! Oh, my father, has it come to this!” groaned Denzil, in agony of spirit.

“ The sunlight is setting redly on the rough summits of the Row Tor and Bron Welli. All is quiet—quiet as death around me; I can hear but the beating of my own heart, the most earnest prayers and blessings of which go with these lines across the seas to you, dear Denzil.”

So ended this letter, which he read many, many times, heedless of the unwonted bustle which reigned in the cantonments, where the gunners were getting additional cannon mounted, the miners forming barricades and traverses, and other vigorous preparations being made for defence in case of a too-probable attack.

Denzil had learned that within every shadow, however deep, there may be a darker shade; and now that shade within the shadow that had fallen on him was the death of his mother.

His mother dead! Another beloved face gone as his father’s had gone—a sweet and winning face he saw in fancy still, yet never should look on again. How much there were of past care and years of love and tenderness to remember now! Then there were his only sister’s utter loneliness and helplessness to appal him. How trivial a calamity seemed the coquetry of Rose Tre-carrel when compared to sorrows such as these! And she had died the tenant of a humble cottage on the moors, the property of Mike Treherne, the miner, whose son was now a sergeant in his company!

And could it be that for months past, while he had been happy, thoughtless, heedless, and full of merriment among his comrades, that she who loved him beyond her own life, purely and unselfishly as only a mother can love an only son, had been in her dark cold grave, and he knew it not? No thought by day, no vision by night, no intuition or thrill of magnetic affinity (such as that of which we read in the Corsican twins and their mother), had told him of this; and yet it was so.

Far away from where the embattled Bala Hissar looked down on the flowing Cabul, on the Mosque of Baber, and the Obelisk of Alexander the Macedonian, from the English cantonments and all their associations, even from thoughts of Rose Trecarrel's auburn hair and tender brown eyes, Denzil's mind, swifter than the electric telegraph, flashed home to the land from whence that letter came—to Cornwall, with its mines below the rolling sea; to its granite quarries, where the thunder-blast, loud as a salvo from the Bala Hissar, told of the riven rock; to its stone avenues, solemn and hoary, and the great rock-pillars of the Fire Worshippers of old; to the dark brown moors of Bodmin, where in summer the drowsy bee hummed over the heath-bells and wild honeysuckle; to the towering bluffs, on which the empurpled waves were rolling in the light of the sun as he set beyond Scilly, "the isles of the god of day;" to tarns where the water-lily floated, and to pools where the speckled trout was darting to and fro; to his rugged home, we say, went all his thoughts—to the Land's End, with all its masses of splintered rocks, worn and bleached by the seas of ages, split and rent like columns of basalt amid the brine—rocks where the fresh-smelling seaweed and the scarlet sea-anemone clung, and on whose summit the weary miner sometimes sat and rested after his toil to watch the passing ships, or to ponder when next his pickaxe would discover "a lode of tin or a goodly bunch of copper ore" in those burrows beneath the sea over which the keels were gliding, their crews little wotting that human beings were in those lighted mines fathoms deep below;—over all these familiar scenes the mind of Denzil wandered, to settle again in fancy on his dead mother's face; to think of his sister's loneliness—of the vast distance by sea and land that separated them—of his own now narrow means; and his heart seemed to wither up within him.

So the long night wore away, and the day began to break. Its advent was heralded by the boom of a 24-pounder from the Bala Hissar, by the merry drums and fifes giving the *reveillez*, and by strokes on the flat metal gurries that hung in front of the guard-houses; but Denzil sat heedless, very pale, and absorbed in thought.



"Come, my dear fellow, don't mope, and don't give way thus—it is no earthly use doing so," said the cheerful voice of Bob Waller on the evening of the second day that Denzil had been permitted to absent himself from parade. "I know what I felt when my own mother died—God rest her! We were on the march to Ferozepore, under General Duncan, when the letter reached me—thought I should die too—wanted sick leave to go home, and all that sort of thing. Come to my bungalow and have a weed, with some brandy-pawnee; or shall I stay with you? By the way, here is Trevelyan's card of condolence. Good style of fellow, Trevelyan: he and the Trecarrels give you heir kindest wishes." (This conjunction made Denzil wince.) Will you come with me to Mabel—Miss Trecarrel, I mean?" added the good-hearted, well-meaning Waller. "She is so sensible, sympathetic, and kind."

"I should prefer being alone," replied Denzil moodily.

"But you can't be alone."

"Why?"

"The whole 37th have come in, and the Shah's 6th Foot from the Bala Hissar. These Afghan beggars have some movement in contemplation to cut us off, and the cantonments are quite rowded."

But for a time Denzil would seek no relief, save in military duty.



CHAPTER XLI.

IN THE FORTIFIED CAMP.

THE place of Sir William Macnaghten as Envoy of the Queen was supplied by Major Pottinger, C.B., who, together with Brigadier Shelton, renewed negotiations with Ackbar Khan, and strove to effect a peaceful retreat of our troops from Cabul. After the recent assassinations and many other outrages,—after the reoccupation by the natives of the eleven square Afghan forts that stood around the cantonments, thus almost entirely enclosing and secluding our slender European force,—after all hope of Sir Robert Sale's gallant brigade returning from Jellalabad to their aid, and other hope of succour from our troops in Candahar passed away, matters began to look gloomy indeed; but none could foresee, though many feared, the end.

No attempt was made by General Elphinstone, who, though once a gallant officer, was aged and ailing now, to avenge the deaths of Macnaghten, Trevor, Burnes, and others; to uphold

the Shah, then all but besieged in his citadel by rebels under Ackbar ; or to assert the dignity of Britain in that remote quarter of the world. Many officers murmured and remonstrated on the necessity for immediate action ; but such is the force of discipline and of military etiquette, that not one had the moral courage to assume the serious responsibility of appealing to the troops and usurping the command. Councils of war were held ; but it is well known that such councils seldom urge fighting ; and all these ended in mere vacillation, indecision, and inanity.

The greatest force of the insurgent Afghans was in Mahommed Khan's fort, which stood nine hundred yards distant from the cantonment guns ; but these, being only nine-pounders, were useless for breaching purposes ; and as this fort commands the road that leads to the city and the Bala Hissar, supplies from that quarter were completely cut off ; and so were they from every other point save the village of Beymaru, where they were procured at vast cost ; and when that source failed—our troops, who with their camp-followers, the necessity and the curse of every Indo-British army, made up six and twenty thousand souls penned within the cantonments—the threat of Ackbar, that our horses would yet gnaw each other's tails and the tent-pegs, would become terribly true, unless a successful retreat through the passes were achieved ; but for that movement, who now could trust to the promises, the honour, or the humanity of the hostile and exulting Afghans ?

Though formed into innumerable petty septs, like the clans of the Scottish Highlands, these people are attached more to the community than the chief of it ; and though divided by many bitter quarrels among themselves, they were united enough in their hatred of all Kaffirs and Feringhees, and in the hope of getting all their women and property as spoil. Like a Scottish clan of old, an Afghan tribe never refuses the rights of hospitality to a native suppliant. The fugitive who flies from his clan, even though stained with blood, is protected by the tribe upon whose mercy he casts himself, and war to the death would ensue rather than surrender him. All these little republics were now amalgamated for two purposes—the destruction of Shah Sujah and his family, and the expulsion or destruction of our little army that had enthroned him.

No one ever ventured beyond the secure walls of the cantonment now, and every other day shots were exchanged between the sentinels and scouting-parties of Afghan horsemen who rode between the forts, brandishing their sabres or matchlocks in angry bravado ; and now and then the artillery tried a little practice with their nine-pounders on Mahommed Khan's fort.

Nor where the Shah's Gholandazees, under his *Topshee Bashee*, or General of the Ordnance, in the Bala Hissar quite idle ; thus almost nightly there floated above the city a red light, that brought forth tower and dome in dark relief, as the gleam of musketry and cannon fell on the atmosphere ; the smoke of gunpowder at night is always somewhat of a red tint.

The ladies had got over much of their squeamishness about the discharge of firearms. Poor things, they were learning fast to look, almost without shrinking, on the fall of friend and foe, nor to wink at the flash of a musket, even those who had once shared the old dame's idea with regard to such implements, that, "whether loaded or unloaded, they were apt to go off."

The music of the bands was heard no more, promenades, rides, and drives were at an end now, and General Trecarrel's handsome London-made carriage, with its crimson-lined tiger-skin, the spoil of a splendid animal potted by Waller in the Siah Sung, had become, by the simple law of appropriation, the property of Ameen Oollah Khan for the use of his four wives.

Denzil and Audley Trevelyan did not meet much on duty, as the latter was on the Staff, had little to do with parades, and nothing whatever with guards, pickets, or working parties. Puzzled by the Lamorna peerage story (as Sybil called it), a story so strange and unsupported by proper evidence, Denzil deemed that as yet perfect silence in the matter was his proper plan ; thus he was coolly courteous to Audley, whose advances, made in consequence of the secret interest felt in Sybil, he rather repelled.

Audley was sometimes in the mess-bungalow of the battalion to which the company of Denzil was attached ; but his staff duties kept him much about the quarters of General Trecarrel, and consequently more in the society of Rose than Denzil quite relished. Since the day of the conference he had never once visited her, and thus he felt with intense bitterness that he had been quietly supplanted there by the son of one who had supplanted him at home in rank and title, and hence more than ever did he loathe the obligation—the debt of gratitude he owed to Audley for the service he had done to Sybil ; and under all the circumstances in which he was placed, he felt the sense of it most oppressive.

"And where is Sybil now?" thought Denzil, despondingly ; "in what country, and with whom?"

Who was the lady of rank she had referred to? No more letters could reach Cabul now, and months must elapse ere he heard from her again or learned her fate.

No confidences passed between him and Audley ; yet the latter, had he known of it, would have risked much to have perused her last epistle, with the single mention of his own name

therein, and the current of thoughts it seemed to open up—thoughts to which he alone had the key.

Denzil had a longing desire to do something brilliant, that he might shine in the estimation of Rose Trecarrel. With the combined vanity and diffidence natural to a young man, he sometimes flattered himself that his handsome uniform might regain him favour in her eyes, if no other merit, mental or physical, did so; but in that he reckoned without his host, for Rose was too much accustomed to see regimentals about her—the scarlet of the Queen's troops, the silver grey of the Indian cavalry, the blue and gold of the artillery, and the quaint, half-oriental splendour of the irregular horse. As a flirt she preferred the scarlet and, perhaps, as one with an eye to a good marriage, the sombre black swallow-tail of the C. S.

With all her constitutional coquetry, she was not without certain emotion of compunction at times for the part she had played with Denzil. Of all the admirers she possessed, he had seemed the most earnest, the most bewildered by her beauty, and the most true; but then, as she said to Mabel, "he was so young and, poor fellow, only a subaltern, so what did it matter in the long run, a little trifling with him, when it amused her, and Cabu had been so dull."

"Going to India to be married," said Mabel, "of course mean going there to be married *well*. Trevelyan is only a subaltern too."

"But the son and heir of Lord Lamorna; so one may cast one's hawks at him."

"And Polwhele is only a subaltern."

"But with a place that spreads from Cornwall into Devonshire I shall not make a fool of myself, Mab—yet I shall marry for love, and love only, if I marry at all," said Rose, as her white fingers wreathed up the shining ripples of her hair before retiring for the night.

"Going out" was then one of the matrimonial institutions of Anglo-Indian society; but the P. and O. liners, with the Overland Route, have knocked that institution on the head, or nearly so.

"I told you how it would be, old fellow," said Polwhele to Denzil, who was sad and sombre; "she affects Trevelyan now and we are all at a discount now, even the cavalry men."

"But Trevelyan has come back to India a lord's son, and is on papa's staff. A deuced fine thing it must be to wake up some morning and find oneself famous in that fashion," said Burgoyne of the 37th, ignorant of how galling his remarks were to Denzil.

And so several days of constant excitement were passed in the cantonments, yet no definite plan as to the future was formed

whether to risk a retreat through Khyber Pass, or throw the whole force into the Bala Hissar, and defend it to the last gasp, as more than once General Trecarrel had urged at the council of war, but urged in vain.

CHAPTER XLII.

CHRISTMAS AT CABUL.

THE state of suspense endured by our whole force in Cabul, especially those men who had wives and families, was fully shared by Waller, whose chief anxiety was Mabel Trecarrel ; yet it could not repress his great flow of animal spirits, and thus his bungalow was always the resort of a few happy heedless fellows, who had no particular care but to kill time when not killing the Afghans, a resource that was yet to come.

Somewhat the world reproduces itself everywhere, and though provisions were scant and short, and shot and shell were in plenty and to spare, in the crowded cantonments of Cabul, there were yet space and leisure for fun and flirtation—even scandal and gossip.

It was Christmas-time there too, but, save the blasts of snow that came from the hills of Kohistan, how unlike our Christmas-time at home !

There was no Christmas cheer, to begin with : plum-pudding and roast goose were thought of and remembered, certainly ; but no such things were to be found in that fortified camp between the Black Rocks and the Hills of Beymaru ; neither were there dark green holly with scarlet berries and mistletoe to dance under, nor Christmas bells to usher in the morn, for even our humble mission-house had been fired by the Afghans ; no Christmas gifts, or boxes, or trees full of shining toys to make happy the hearts of those little ones whose parents looked forward with intense dread to the future, and thought regretfully of Christmas in happy England—the merry meetings of parents and home-returning boys. Christmas, we say, was remembered with all its happy and hearty associations of yule, festivity, and wassail, the pledge old as the days when Hengist's Saxon daughter drank *Waes Huel* to Vortigern ; but now, on the anniversary of that day when the star shone over Bethlehem, and a Babe was born to die for all mankind, our half-starved troops were giving shot and shell, grape and canister, with right good will, and the sombre night closed down upon red flames in the towering city, and its silence was broken, not by music, or carols, or chimes, but

the voice of many a jackal and hyæna as they preyed on the corpses that lay unburied by the Cabul river.

Waller's bungalow had several visitors on the following evening ; among others, Jack Polwhele and Denzil, who had returned from the village of Beymaru, where they had partly purchased and partly looted, and most successfully brought into camp at the point of the bayonet, a vast quantity of ground wheat and dhal or split peas, from the stores of a bunneah or corn-contractor. With these they also brought in several head of cattle for the use of the troops.

"Supplies but for which," as Waller said, "the morrow might have found us starving, or having only the resort of the Polar bears, who, in time of scarcity, find a pleasure in licking their paws. You'll come to my bungalow," he added, as the foraging party came in double quick through the Kohistan gate. "Trevelyan's coming—he and Polwhele ; Trevelyan is one of ours now, so we four Cornishmen shall make a night of it. I have a round of beef that is getting small by degrees and beautifully less, a gallant jar of Cabul wine that I looted in the house of a kussilbash, and no end of cheroots. Deuce ! I'll take no excuse," said Waller, on seeing how flushed and sombre Denzil became on hearing Audley's name.

"I shall take care to bring him, Waller," said Polwhele, as he went off to his quarters, full of excitement with his recent success, and singing the refrain of the old song,—

" And will Trelawney die?
And will Trelawney die?
Then thirty thousand Cornishmen
Shall know the reason why?"

"I wish we had but the third of those thirty thousand here to help us out of this beastly place where it has pleased her Majesty we should set up our tent-poles," said Waller. "I expect Burgoyne also to-night, and he will be sure to bring us the last news from the city, as he has accompanied Brigadier Shelton to another conference with those children of the prophet."

"Another conference?" said Denzil.

"Yes, by Jove ! risky and plucky, is it not?"

"Awfully so, after what has happened to poor Burnes, Macnaghten, and the rest."

"But needs must, for we cannot choose now."

For on this evening fresh and, as the event proved, nearly final negotiations had been opened between the General and Ackbar Khan, to whom he had sent Brigadier Shelton, Major Pottinger, and Burgoyne. Thus the ladies in camp and all the

white women, whose persons had been demanded as *hostages*, were in no ordinary state of anxiety to learn the result.

Polwhele and Denzil were betimes in Waller's quarters, where two officers of the 37th and two of the 54th had dropped in. Trevelyan had not arrived, and Denzil in fancy saw him hanging over the chair of Rose, as he had seen him last. He was nervously jealous, somewhat afraid of his own temper, and hoped the night should pass without an unseemly quarrel. He was in wretched spirits, for Sybil's letter and her future weighed upon his mind. This air of gloom was unheeded by his companions. What was the demise, so far away, too, of one whose face they never saw, to them who were daily and hourly front to front with death himself? Yet he strove to join in their conversation, while cigars were lit and Waller's jar of wine passed briskly to and fro, and the cold round, with flour chupatties, was in great request.

"As things go now," said the host, who lounged on a couple of bullock-trunks, "we are thankful to get even the leg of a wild sheep—a regular Persian *doomba*, with a tail a foot broad, and can only think regretfully of choice entrées, of pâtés de foie gras from beautiful Strasburg, of boned larks and truffled turkeys of Paris—croquettes, côtelettes, and kidneys stewed in Madeira, caviare from the Don, and ortolans from Lombardy, and a thousand other nice little things we shall never see, till the cold white cliffs of the South Foreland are rising on our lee bow. Oh! soul of Lucullus and of the noble science of gastronomy!"

"Waller, you are irrepressible," said Polwhele. "Devereaux, how is the General? have you heard?"

"Trecarrel?" asked Denzil, colouring.

"No. You think, perhaps, there is no other General in the world. I mean poor Elphinstone."

"The old man is going fast."

"And the evening of his life is full of dark clouds, without a single star," added Waller.

"You grow quite poetic, Bob."

"Then it is amid the veriest prose of life."

"I had a narrow escape from a juzail ball," said Denzil, rather pensively. "It passed through my forage-cap, and I have no wish to be killed as a subaltern."

"A bullet won't feel a bit the more pleasant if it hits you as a captain," said a 37th man, laughing.

Would Rose regret him? had been Denzil's secret thought; and now amid the gay clatter of tongues around him, the speculations as to the treaty on the *tapis*, the chances of a peaceful retreat, the pros and cons of why Sale did not cut his way back from Jellalabad, and some of that banter about women which

seems inseparable from the conversation of young men—more than all, of military men—he was startled by some of the things that were said of Rose Trecarrel, and which, though bitter to hear, served to divert his grief. His self-esteem—his *amour propre* had been severely wounded, and he had to conceal these emotions from Waller and Polwheel ; yet they suspected that “something was up,” by his ceasing to go near the Trecarrels, at whose villa near the Residency he had been almost a daily visitor.

Could the young man have foreseen it in his bitterness he might have rejoiced that the Afghan sabre was ere long to cut the Gordian knot of all his difficulties.

Jack Polwheel, who had been eyeing him silently with a comical twinkle in his black eyes, said, in a low voice—

“ So Devereaux, the mistress of your destiny has proved slippery after all ! Laugh at the whole affair, and you’ll soon forget all about it. Were I in your place, she might—as the song has it—go to Hong Kong for me.”

Denzil knit his brow and reddened with irritation ; but, tipping the ashes of his cigar and watching the smoke thereof as it ascended to the straw-roof of the bungalow, Jack resumed, in a voice so low as to be unheard by Waller—

“ With a vast amount of *espiallerie*, Rose, I must admit, has many physical attractions ; and, Denzil, you were her pet flirtation for the nonce—every fellow saw that—nothing more. It is a fine thing to talk to a handsome girl about ‘elective affinities and the union of souls,’ that ‘marriages are made in heaven, and *not* in the money-market’ or the shop of some sharping lawyer ; but it often grows perilous work for a griff, with a girl like Rose, who cannot care very much for any one.”

Denzil still sat smoking in silence, and felt somewhat perplexed by the extreme candour of his brother-officer. In short, he knew not quite how to take it.

“ Could she only have been flirting with me ? ” thought he, and we fear Rose would have answered in the affirmative. “ No two persons, I have heard, have exactly the same or correct idea of what flirting is ” (*he had not*) : “ talking a deal to a pretty girl, or laughing much with her, are called so ; but surely there may be deeper flirting, at times, in silence. Oh ! we were not flirting : I loved her—I love her yet—and thought she loved me, when glance met glance, and eye answered to eye the *unasked question* ! ”

“ I know her style perfectly,” resumed Polwheel, oddly enough proceeding to crush the unuttered thought ; “ so does Burgoyne ; so do Grahame and Ravelstoke, of the 37th, and ever so many more. She asked you tenderly about animal magnetism—showed

you the whiteness of her ungloved hand, and asked you, no doubt, about the trimming of her dress ; but you were to be friends—the dearest friends only, and all that sort of thing."

Poor Denzil was petrified ; but these words were partly effecting a cure, and he strove to laugh.

"Don't quiz me, Jack," said he ; "but, upon my soul. I could be guilty of any folly for that girl—yet it would be madness, you know. What would the General say, and the mess think and say, too?"

"I don't precisely catch your meaning,—folly and madness are pretty synonymous in a matrimonial sense ; but what did you think of committing yourself to ? a proposal—eh ?"

Denzil did not reply ; he could only sigh and smoke viciously.

"Take your wine, old fellow, and don't bother about it," said Waller, who had just begun to listen. "I nearly went mad for love myself in my first red coat ; but the Colonel saved me by detachment duty ; and when last I saw my inamorata, after seven years of matrimony, her figure quite spoiled for waltzing, and a squad of little squalling infantry about her, I laughed at my escape."

Denzil remembered the bantering remarks of the cavalry officer at the band-stand ; and their estimate of Rose seemed to tally unpleasantly with that of Polwheel.

"Fool that I have been !—yet could I help it ?" he thought. "Could I help doing so again—though she is one that makes of love a jest and a scoff ?"

He felt that she had lured him into a passionate declaration merely to cast him off wantonly and laugh at him, perhaps, with Audley Trevelyan. She might not care for him, and yet dislike to see him care for *another*. Hence rage prompted him one moment to try and fall in love with some other girl (there was not much choice in the cantonment, certainly), and the next he felt cynically disposed to hate her and all womankind. Anon that emotion would pass away, and he felt himself still her very slave, who would plead for a word, a glance, or smile.

To abstain from visiting as before would soon excite remark ; and yet to resume his visits would be to see, with bitterness and humiliation, another too palpably preferred, where he had deemed himself the chosen favourite.

"And is it actually true that Waller is booked at last ?" said Polwheel.

"Deuce ! how can I tell ?" replied Denzil, curtly, blowing away a ring of smoke.

"It may be all gossip—for he is one whom hitherto the female world have found impossible to entrap ; but here comes Trevelyan," he added, as the Hindoo servant placed lighted wax

candles on the table, and Audley entered, looking, as Denzil thought, provokingly handsome, cool, self-possessed, and fashionable in bearing.

The first questions asked were, whether any tidings had come from the city, for after late events, the list of death and decapitation ran by those who ventured to confer with Ackbar and the insurgent Khans was indeed a painful and terrible one. Neither Brigadier Shelton, Major Pottinger, nor Burgoyne had returned as yet ; so the conversation speedily fell back into its channel of light-heartedness.

"So, Trevelyan," said Waller, quite forgetting the presence of Denzil, and blundering on a most unlucky topic, "I heard that you have been flirting furiously all day with Rose Trecarrel ; but then, as the aide-de-camp, you are quite a friend of the family."

"Oh ! ours is an old affair," replied Audley, laughing heartily, as he selected a cheroot ; "like the 'Belle of the Ball,'" he added, profoundly ignorant of Denzil's regard for her, "Miss Rose

'Has smiled on many, just for fun—
I knew that there was nothing in it ;
I was the FIRST, the ONLY one,
Her heart had thought of for a minute ;
I knew it, for she told me so,
In phrase that was divinely moulded ;
She wrote a charming hand, and oh !
How sweetly all her notes were folded !'

We were old friends at home in Cornwall ; besides, she is so lady-like and pretty—almost beautiful."

"That I grant you," said Polwhele, who saw—that which Denzil did not—that Audley's tone and manner had nothing of the lover in them ; "but Rose has always more strings than one to her bow."

"Or, more beaux than one to her string," said Waller, laughing.

"Never puts all her money on one horse anyway. Bagging a sub. is to her like snipe-shooting in an Irish bog ; poor sport after all ; but a power sight better than none," said Ravelstoke, of the 37th Native Infantry, at whose freedom of speech Waller frowned.

And this was the consolation to which Denzil was treated.

How little he knew that at that very time, Audley Trevelyan, in his heart, was contrasting Sybil's pure and loving prattle, her genuine enthusiasm in poetry, art, and all that was beautiful in nature, with the occasional rantipole of this garrison belle.

"What is that ?" said Waller, suddenly, as a drum was beaten hurriedly outside.

"The guard of ours, at the Kohistan gate, getting under

arms," replied Ravelstoke ; " Brigadier Shelton has come with tidings, and his head on his shoulders—we shall soon know our fate now!"

The sound of hoofs trotting fast through the Cantonments was heard, as the gate was closed and secured ; and in a minute or less, Burgoyne, of the 37th, came in with his sword under his arm, and a brace of loaded pistols in his waistbelt.

He looked pale, excited, and weary indeed !

" Now, Burgoyne, for your news ?" said Waller ; " but take a pull at that wine-jar first."

Burgoyne did so, with an air of thirst and lassitude, though the atmosphere was intensely cold.

" Is the Brigadier safe ?" said Polwhele.

" Yes."

" And Pottinger, too ?"

" Yes ; we have come back unharmed."

" And no attempt was made to assassinate or detain you ?"

" None ; but what think you is the proposal now—nearly the same as before—for we are checkmated here, and these insurgent scoundrels know it. Lawrence, Mackenzie, Conolly, and some other Europeans are still alive in their hands, and kept as hostages. These they offer to exchange, if the General will leave in their place all our married officers and their families ; the entire treasure in the military chest ; all our cannon, except six ; and that we depart at once ; our rear to be covered by four hundred armed Kohistanees, who, if handsomely paid, will march with us so far as Jellalabad, where, according to the news brought by a cossid, Sir Robert Sale is so closely besieged that those among us who survive to reach the plains will have to cut their way in with the cold steel."

Mingled expressions of rage and indignation were uttered by all save Waller, who looked singularly pale and calm.

" And what was the reply to these degrading proposals ?" he asked, while quietly selecting and lighting a cigar.

" It was answered that a British General might, if he chose, leave or give certain officers as hostages, but that he had no power over their wives and families. That without the full consent of husbands and parents, the ladies and children would not be left behind."

" I should think not—left, d—n it, to certain destruction !" exclaimed Polwhele, his dark eyes flashing fire. Burgoyne resumed :

" It was then that Ackbar said to us, mockingly, ' If you save your lives, what do the lives or honour, as you call it, of your wives or sisters matter ? They are only women, and, as women, are spoil, like your horses and camels, yaboos, shawls, pipes, and

gunpowder. Allah ! you Kaffirs are strange dogs. And there, for to-night," the matter rests. News came, however, that the Queen's 16th Lancers, the 9th, and 31st Regiments have come up country, as far as Peshawur ; but that is fully two hundred miles distant ; the defiles are full of snow, and they cannot be here in time either to assist or save us."

These details, which are matters of history, now filled all in that isolated camp with extreme dismay. Every hour provisions were growing more scarce ; every hour the snow was falling more heavily, and thus the tremendous mountain gorges through which the route lies to Jellalabad or Peshawur, were hourly becoming more and more impassable.

To move or quit the fortified Cantonments without the solemn promise of safe conduct from the vast hordes in arms, was perilous in the extreme. To remain was but to die by slow starvation or the sword. So the question asked by the Khan of Khelat, was likely to have a terrible answer.

" Major Thain," writes Lady Sale, " was now sent round to ask all the married officers if they would consent to their wives staying, offering those who did so a salary of 2000 rupees a month ! Lieutenant Eyre said, that if it was to be productive of good, he would stay with his wife and child. The others all refused to risk the safety of their families. Captain Anderson said that he would rather put a pistol to his wife's head and shoot her ; and Sturt declared that his wife and mother should only be taken from him at the point of the bayonet ; for himself he was ready to perform any duty imposed upon him."*

Sturdy old General Trecarrel swore that he would take his Company of the Cornish Light Infantry, put Mabel and Rose in the centre, and force a way through the passes at all hazards, rather than leave them to a fate which none could foresee. At the worst, they could all die there together, and there could be little doubt of the event if we marched without terms, for tidings came from Taj Mahammed, the Wuzeer, that Aziz Khan, with 10,000 Kohistanees, had beset the road at Tezeen ; and that the warriors of the Ghilzie tribe (which numbers 600,000 souls) were in possession of all the heights overlooking it.

Tears and distress were visible on all hands now; sickness and suffering increased rapidly, while every night the bugles sounded to arms, and cannon and musketry were discharged at the armed bands of horse and foot which menaced the front and rear gates, or sought plunder in the now abandoned Residency, and the villas previously occupied by General Trecarrel, Captain Trevor, and others.

* " Journal of the Disasters in Afghanistan." Major Thain belonged to H. M. 21st Foot, but was then on the Staff.

Pale women clasped their children to their breasts, and men their wives, as if the parting hour of all was already come. The eyes of the soldiers filled and flashed with honest pity and manly indignation at the idea of yielding up civilized women, tender English ladies and helpless little children, to such barbarians as these; while the sick and wounded in hospital were full of horror and dismay at their own helplessness.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MORNING OF THE RETREAT.

WAR, dread war, is one of the greatest games in life! "It is a passion even in the lower ranks of the soldiery; while for those in command it is the most intoxicating, the most imperious of passions. Where shall we find a wider field for energy of character, for the calculations of intellect and the flashes of genius? In him who is inflamed by glory, hunger, thirst, wounds, incessantly impending death itself, produce a sort of intoxication; the sudden combination of intermediate causes with foreseen chances, throw into this exalted game a never ceasing interest, equal to the emotion excited at long intervals by the most terrible situations of life!"

In the movement we are about to narrate, there was no room for the display of generalship, though more than enough for endurance and the most heroic courage; but some such enthusiastic reflections as these were floating in the mind of Denzil, when, by the prolonged notes of the trumpet, and the long roll on the drum, the entire troops in the Cantonments, horse, foot, and artillery, began to get under arms on the morning of the 6th of January, to commence that which eventually proved to be one of the most disastrous retreats on record.

How often had the unfortunate Trevor, Waller, Burgoyne, and others, exclaimed, in their weariness of heart—

"Let us fight our way down, destroying everything ere we leave the Cantonments, and at least one-third of us shall reach Jellalabad!" And now the time had come.

It had been finally arranged by the Staff at Head-quarters, to pay more than fourteen lacs* of rupees to Ackbar Khan, Ameen Oollah Khan, Shireen Khan of the Kussilbashes, the Ghilzie Chiefs, and other treacherous villains, that our troops might march unmolested; Osman Khan undertaking, with his tribe,

* A *lac* is one hundred thousand.

to escort them so far as Peshawur, the gate of British India, towards Central India. The money was negotiated on the spot by a Cashmere merchant and some Hindoo schroffs or bankers in Cabul. In vain did Major Pottinger and many other officers raise their voices indignantly against this measure of the feeble and aged Elphinstone.

"Never before," they exclaimed, "were British soldiers compelled to *buy* a way out of an enemy's country, to repay with gold the debt contracted by steel!"

But the bargain was struck; Ackbar Khan and his allies were avariciously resolute that it should be adhered to by *us*, at least.

Silently and quickly the troops, 4,500 strong, were formed by Regiments and Brigades; but the confusion around them, in the streets of bungalows or huts, was great, from the number and terror of the camp followers, now diminished by death, sickness, or desertion, to somewhere about 12,000. Hammocks had been prepared wherein to carry the sick and wounded through the passes; but as the snowfall was deep, this was thought to be impracticable; so in virtue of the species of armistice, nearly the whole of these unfortunate creatures, officers, soldiers, and camp followers had been conveyed into the city, where they were to be left to the care—to the mercy, of the Afghans, certain medical officers casting lots for the perilous duty of remaining behind to attend them, and these devoted Samaritans proved to be Drs. Berwick and Campbell of the 54th Infantry.

As a foretaste of what was soon to happen, the bearers, returning from the city with the litters, were fired upon, and all shot down by the Afghans; and on this very morning, as the grey dawn began to steal down the mountains from their reddened summits to the plain, the dark corpses of the Hindoo dhooley-wallahs could be seen dotting all the expanse of snow between the Cantonments and Cabul; while, to still the growing clamour, three pieces of cannon, and the greater portion of our treasure, were made over to the rabble.

In rear of his company, awaiting the order to march, Denzil stood leaning on his sword and muffled in a furred posheet which he wore above his uniform, as the thermometer was below zero and all the troops were in those blue great-coats usually worn by our soldiers in India. The Europeans looked pale, thin, and haggard, and the dark Bengal sepoys seemed of a livid or pea-green tint, as the cold daylight stole in.

How often Denzil had watched the great sun of the Eastern world rise red and fiery above those eternally snow-clad peaks of Kohistan; and now he was, he hoped, looking on its rising for the last time there.

Alas ! many more were looking on it, that were never to see it set.

Notwithstanding the desperation of their affairs, many were in excellent spirits at the prospect of a change of quarters ; and he heard the voice of Rose Trecarrel, talking gaily to one or two officers, as she, Mabel, and some other ladies came forth mounted, to ride for surer protection among the cavalry. With them were Lady Sale and the widowed Lady Macnaghten, who had vainly offered princely bribes for her husband's mutilated body, and had now to depart with the harrowing knowledge that it was still exposed in the public market-place. Some of the ladies were on camels, others in dhooleys with their children nestling beside them for warmth ; but the Trecarrels were mounted on fine Arab horses, and wore sheep-skin spencers called *neemches* over their riding habits, for comfort and also for disguise, which they had further to aid by having turbans twisted round their heads, so Rose could not help laughing heartily at the oddity of her attire.

"Good-morning," said she, in her sweetest tone, to Denzil, who had been watching her wistfully.

He was as a very slave in her presence, he loved her so, and now when she held out her hand, chill though the air, ungloved (for a moment of course) the presence of others alone prevented him from, perhaps, kissing it.

"You have a cold journey before you," said he.

"And you a most toilsome march afoot. Heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, we are told ; I wish it would temper the wind to me," said Rose, with her teeth, short, beautiful and white, chattering as she spoke.

"What have you been doing for all these days past ? In what part of the Cantonnements have you hidden yourself?" she asked in a low and soft voice.

"Oh—you speak to me kindly—almost tenderly, do you?" said Denzil, with bitterness in his tone ; "have you obtained leave from your friend on the Staff to address me?"

He looked at her with eyes in whose expression anger and sorrow mingled, while she looked at him smiling and deprecatory, more than half flattered by his jealous outburst amid the terrors that menaced them all.

"You are surely in a frightful humour this morning," said she ; "I shall certainly pity the Afghans if you fall foul of any of them."

"Cold-hearted Rose," replied Denzil, who was in no humour for jesting ; "I would not have your ungenerous nature, to hold that title of which, as yet, fate deprives me, though that might make you love me again—even if you ever loved me at all,"

"Is this a comedy, Denzil?" said she, smiling more than ever.

"I would to God we had never met," said Denzil in a low voice, while his lip quivered, for he conceived that the secret story of his family had affected her towards him; "you have been but amusing yourself with me; passing the hours that would have been dull here, in playing with my heart—my feelings."

"Why, Denzil Devereaux—you talk like a girl; whoever heard of a man's heart or feelings being trifled with?" said she, with a little silvery laugh as she moved her horse, to speak with some one else.

"Dear Mabel," said Waller in a tender and earnest voice, as his *fiancée* checked her Arab for a moment by his side, and gave him her hand with a bright confiding smile; "to-day begins, I hope, the first stage of our long homeward journey."

"England, with all thy faults, I love thee still," said she, laughing as she rejoined her sister, and her lover, who was somewhat of a critic, thought she was the handsomest girl he had ever seen on horseback.

Bob and Mabel had already begun to fashion mental pictures of a home-life in England, a happy home, a dream life; a pretty house in some sequestered spot, where the old Cornish elm trees might echo to merry children's voices, while the days went by in peace and happiness; but here the troops were called to "attention," and General Trecarrel, who was "mounted," led his daughters to where the advanced guard was posted, and where all the ladies were placed among the cavalry, to the great delight of a couple of cornets who complacently stroked the fair fluff that would in time become moustaches, and begged them not to be in the least alarmed, as they had a most efficient escort.

"Rose," urged Mabel, who had more power of character than her sister and less of folly in her disposition, "it is cruel of you to make such a victim of that poor lad, Devereaux—he is so handsome too."

"That is the reason; but do I ask him to love me?"

"No; you only lure him into doing so; you are incorrigible, and laugh at being so."

"There is no need to think of marrying—the idea is absurd; though one may get up a liking."

"Oh fie!" said Mabel, smiling in spite of herself.

"How sensible and solid we have become since Waller came to the point, and made it all square with papa."

"He has certainly asked me to become his," replied Mabel, with a bright, soft smile.

"I would rather be my *own*," said the laughing coquette.

This whispered conversation was now interrupted by a terrific

yell outside the Cantonment walls ; it rent the air, and the ladies grew pale as they looked inquiringly in each other's faces. General Trecarrel grew very white, and instinctively drew his sword. On that morning, when he knelt in prayer beside his daughters, ere they left their abode to mount, he had been thinking that in such a place and under such circumstances as theirs, how happy was the man who was alone in the world ; how to be envied the soldier, who had only his firelock and knapsack to care for ; who had only himself to think of, and had no dread for the sighs, the tears, and the danger of those he loved best on earth !

Thousands of Afghans and fanatical Ghazees were now crowding close to the walls, impatient for plunder and rapine, hissing like serpents, spitting like tiger-cats, and brandishing their bare weapons with an air of ferocity and grimace peculiar to Orientals only ; but as yet contenting themselves with throwing stones, which the Afghans do with a strength and precision exclusively their own. By one of these Sergeant Treherne was struck nearly senseless to the earth, when in the act of receiving some order from Waller, who became, for him, unusually excited.

"D—n it !" he exclaimed, "why don't we slew round a bastion gun, and by one dose of grape send a few of these turbaned warriors by the short cut to Paradise, or elsewhere !"

"I should like to see a few of them tied to the lips of six-pounders—for matters are looking decidedly serious," added Polwhele, as the red glare of flames, with columns of lurid and murky smoke, now shot high into the snowy air from the houses of the Envoy, Captain Trevor, General Trecarrel, and others, which had been fired by the predatory horsemen who covered all the plain.

An order was now given to fix bayonets and load with ball-cartridge—the artillery with round shot and grape!

"The troops are to move off from the right of regiments, in open column of sections," cried Audley Trevelyan, repeating the feeble voice of the old General, as he rode from one slender column to another.

"The front to be diminished, if necessary, when we enter the pass," added Major Thain ; "Her Majesty's 44th Foot, one squadron of Irregular Horse and three mountain guns, under Brigadier Anquetil, to form the advance guard. The 54th, the Shah's 6th, the 5th Light Cavalry, and four Horse Artillery guns, will cover the rear."

These corps, already reduced to skeletons, were speedily formed in front and rear of the main column, with which went the baggage, the remaining treasure, the rest of the artillery, and some sick and wounded in litters, and on yaboos or Cabul ponies.

At eight o'clock precisely the order was given to march, and fresh yells, as if all the fiends of Pandemonium had broken loose, resounded from the plain, as the rear-gates of the Cantonment were thrown open ; the bands struck up the "British Grenadiers," and the advanced guard began to defile out upon the road that was to lead them, as they hoped, to Peshawur.

A half-stifled shriek burst from all the ladies, and they implored the troopers of the Irregular Horse to close about them for protection, for the scene around was one replete with terror, a confused and mighty mass of dark, ferocious visages, black, gleaming eyes, white, grinning teeth, and flashing weapons ; so that even the usually irrepressible Rose Trecarrel was completely silent, subdued, and so awed, that she could scarcely breathe.

From the hills of Beymaru the odious Ackbar Khan and others, his adherents, were looking down on our toilworn soldiers as they issued forth with all the honours of war, the colours flying on the wind, with all their brilliant silk and gold embroidery ; the bright bayonets pouring onwards like a stream of rippling steel above the dark columns, for, as already stated, the troops were in their great-coats ; the neighing of the horses, the dull rumble of the artillery wheels, the clatter of sponge and rammer, and of round-shot in the caissons ; and over all, the varied music of the bands, the shrill yet sweet notes of the fifes and the regularly measured resonance of the drums, came upward to his listening ear, with the yells of the Afghans, and the report of the occasional firearms which they began to discharge among the helpless camp followers in the very wantonness of mischief, or Asiatic lust of cruelty.

"Let them go," hissed Ackbar, through his clenched teeth ; "the hungry vultures and the wild Khyberees are alike in waiting ; the dark wings and the avenging sword of Azrael will soon be above them in the air, and the jackals and the Ghoul Babian will batten on their bones !"

And some there were with him, whose eyes seemed chiefly attracted by the group of white ladies who rode on horses or camels, amid the brilliant ranks of the Irregular Cavalry.

"*Dare* they meddle with us, who are British troops, and all in order for battle ?" was the confident thought of many a brave officer, yet of all those 16,500 human beings who issued on that eventful morning from the fortified camp at Cabul, only two were fated to reach Jellalabad alive, and that city is only ninety miles distant.*

* There quitted the cantonments, Europeans, 690 ; cavalry, 970 ; native infantry, 2840 ; camp-followers, 12,000. The Queen's 44th mustered 690 of all ranks.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE HALT BY THE LOGHUR RIVER.

QUICKLY marched our retreating forces, so menacing was the aspect and daring the conduct of the Afghans, that all felt as if something was to be got over, and that the sooner it was faced boldly and gone over, the better.

Prior to leaving the Cantonments, Rose had thought of dropping her whip *en route*, so that one of the handsome young cornets might have to dismount and pick it up; and thus, that by the consequent delay, they should be enabled to ride a little apart from the ladies and the escort; *now*—all such coquettish schemes and follies were forgotten.

Her Arab had been sidling along, coquetting with its own shadow, and rendering an officer's hand on the reins requisite now and then. Even of that attention Rose was oblivious now; laughter and fun had passed away, and a cold shiver passed down the poor girl's spine as she looked around her.

Hemmed in and crowded on by the invading rabble, the march of the columns became speedily disordered, and the music of the bands ceased. The moment our troops were clear of the Cantonments, a vast tide of Afghans, some eight thousand at least, rushed in to pillage the bungalows and other buildings, and then gave all to the flames; thus an indescribable tumult took place. Elsewhere, parties of armed horsemen made cruel and reckless dashes—literal charges—through the long and straggling procession of helpless camp-followers, and even through the column which had the baggage, cutting men down on all sides, and carrying off whatever they could lay hands on, in some instances tearing white children from the arms of their shrieking ayahs and bearing them off at the saddle-bow, to future slavery or death. Corpses soon encumbered all the route, and the snow became reddened with blood.

The air seemed to become laden with a Babel of tumultuous sounds; the fierce yells of the Afghans encouraging each other to rapine and slaughter; the more maniac-like cries of the fanatical Ghazees; the wild wailing of the Hindostani servants, as they, their wives or children perished, under the sabre or the occasional pistol-shot; the roaring of the frightened camels; the bellowing of the artillery bullocks; the voices of the European officers, seeking for a time to control the fury of their men, but succeeding for a time only, for the last file of the rear guard was barely out of the Cantonments, when from the whole line of the western wall, volleys of red flashing musketry were opened upon

us by the Afghans, with their juzails, matchlocks, and even those percussion muskets which Sir Robert Sale was not permitted to take to Jellalabad. Lieutenant Hardyman, of the 5th Cavalry, fell from his horse, shot through the heart, and fifty more were killed or wounded at the same time ; but though the 54th, to which corps Waller's company was attached, commenced an independent file-firing, facing about from time to time as they retreated, the Afghans still pressed upon the columns, discharging their long rifles with sure and deadly aim ; thus, ere long the retreat became a flight, leaving on all sides Hindoos, men, women, and children, expiring of cold, starvation, exhaustion, or wounds.

Imitating the example of Polwhele, Denzil sheathed his sword, and arming himself with a dead man's musket, fired till his hands and elbows ached with the exertion of loading.

Tents and baggage of every kind, even a piece of cannon, were speedily abandoned to the Afghans, for the native servants and drivers fled on all sides, thinking to save their lives, but only to be eventually slaughtered in detail ; while slowly and laboriously through the snow the troops moved towards a gorge in the hills of Siah Sung, in hope to get through the Khoord Cabul Pass before nightfall.

The forms of our half-starved soldiers who had been long on scanty rations of dhal, wild radishes, rice and ghee, were wasted and thin ; their faces were hollow and wan ; their whiskers were matted by mud and blood, the powder of bitten cartridges, and, in many instances, icicles hung from them as the breath froze on their moustaches.

With the baggage, all the remaining treasure became the spoil of the enemy ; many a handsome Hindoo girl was borne off by the horsemen, who, though they galloped in bold defiance along the flanks of the retreating force, did not, as yet, attempt to molest the solid array of the Queen's 44th Foot. It was as in the song of *Pindara* :—

“ Deeply with sáree, doputta, and shawl,
Jewels and gold the looterá is laden ;
Silks and brocades, and what's better than all,
We have the choice of the matron and maiden !
Zenana and harem
Ring forth the alarm—
Vainly their riches and beauties are hoarded !
Hoora ! hoora !
Quick with the damsels,
For hills must be clambered and rivers be forded !”

From the rocks of Siah Sung, as the gorge was entered, more than one juzail ball found its way into the ranks of the advanced

guard. The two fair-haired Cornets of the Irregular Cavalry, mere boys, in most brilliantly elaborate uniforms, fell; both were shot down to perish miserably amid the snow and mud. They sank in succession under the hoofs of the horses ridden by Mabel and Rose, and were left to the Afghans, whose knives would soon end their miseries.

"Oh, what a sight for English ladies to look upon!" exclaimed Audley Trevelyan, feeling acutely the horror of all they were subjected to, while the tears they were forced to shed became frozen on their pale cheeks by the icy mountain wind.

Mabel had her riding-switch shot away by a casual bullet; Lady Sale had one of her arms wounded by another, and several balls passed through the skirt of her riding-habit.

Down below the hills into which they were advancing, and far away in the rear, a sheet of fire still enveloped the whole oblong area of the cantonments, and the plain through which the Cabul flows was enveloped in rolling smoke, amid which the square masses of the Afghan forts loomed darkly forth; but few cared to give a backward glance as the troops toiled doggedly into the mountain gorges, where darkness, the winter storm, and the treacherous foe went with them.

Snow, snow everywhere; the chill atmosphere was full of it; aslant the white flakes were falling to join others on the leafless planes and poplars, on the upturned faces and stiffening bodies of the dead.

There was no horizon—all trace of it had disappeared; the Afghan horsemen hovering on the flanks were like shadows or spectres in the gloom—but shadows from whence a red flash came forth at times, and then a bullet whistled past on its errand of death. After a time these wild cavaliers rode into the ravines, and nothing was seen in the grey obscurity but the white flakes falling silently athwart it; and there were thawing and freezing—freezing and thawing at one and the same time.

It was misery, intense misery, all, and Denzil had but one thought—that on the ruddy, shiny, auburn billows of Rose's hair, and of her sister's too, these flakes were falling now.

With nightfall the firing had ceased; the soldiers marched sternly and silently on in the dark, and even the least callous among them had ceased to shudder now when treading softly on the limbs or breasts of the dead who encumbered the way; and, to those in the rear, it seemed as if all in front were perishing.

"Meanwhile, amid all this horror, where is *she*?" thought Denzil; "with my precious cousin, no doubt—yet I pray God that he may be able to protect her."

More than once on that disastrous march, however, had Audley ridden back to the rear-guard to see if Denzil was safe,

and to kindly proffer the use of his brandy-flask. And now, by a miserable destiny, instead of advancing that night straight through the Khoord Cabul Pass, the inane old General allowed the Afghans to take possession of it, while he, most fatally, ordered his forces to encamp on the right of the Loghur river, if encamping it could be called, when the tents and baggage had alike been lost, the troops were without fuel and had only the snow to lie upon, and the falling snow to cover them.

"The bugles of the advanced guard are sounding a halt," said Waller; "it may be unwise, but I thank Heaven, as I am ready to drop, and shall have to snooze like the rest amid the snow and our glory. Glory—pah ! I would rather have a glass of brandy-pawnee hot than all the glory to be got in British India. Pol-wheelie, make the company pile arms when we come to the halting-place ; and now to look after the Trecarrels—God help them!"

As corps after corps came up and halted, friends and comrades could enquire as to who had been killed or lost on the march—wounded there could be none, as all who sank behind were certain to perish by cold or the long trenchant knives of the Afghans, who had a particular fancy for decapitating all the victims that fell into their hands.

Officers and soldiers were alike maddened with fury against the infamous treachery of those who had been paid in such terms to let them and their families depart in peace ; and on all sides were heard the bitterest execrations of Ackbar Khan and his adherents. These became mingled with loud lamentations and cries of despair, when husbands found that their wives, wives that their husbands, or parents that their children, had been lost—hopelessly lost—on that long and terrible path of death and suffering, which led down the mountains to the rear, a path where none might dare to return or search for those they loved.

In cold and starvation those who had succeeded in bringing their little ones thus far on the way could only pray, and weep the dire necessities of war, and marvel in their hearts if the time would ever come when swords should be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks, and "when nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." As yet, that piping time of peace seemed a long way off.

A few sentinels were posted in the direction of the enemy, and their posts some of them never quitted alive, being found frozen and dead when the relief went round an hour after. A little fire was made for the ladies by burning Audley's pistol-case and an ammunition keg ; and full of pity, compassion, and horror that women, delicately and tenderly nurtured as they had been,

should be subjected to miseries such as these, Waller, Denzil, Ravelstoke, and a few others procured by great exertion a sepoy *pall*, or tent, from the back of a baggage-pony that lay shot in the pass ; and then, scraping away the snow, pitched it for their use.

Therein Mabel, Rose, and seven other ladies passed the night, nestling close together on a *xummul*, or coarse native blanket, with the skirts of their riding-habits wrapped about their feet for warmth.

Audley Trevelyan, General Trecarrel, and other mounted officers kept beside their horses for the same purpose ; and, muffled in their poshteens and blankets, Waller and Denzil lay to leeward of the ladies' tent as a shelter from the biting wind.

So passed the remainder of the morning.

When day began to dawn, and the cold light stole down the mountains upon that melancholy bivouac, it was found that the Shah's 6th Regiment, six hundred strong, had gone off in the dark, deserting to the enemy with all their arms ; but there was another circumstance which created greater alarm still among the Europeans.

Rose Trecarrel was missing, and no trace of her could be found.



C H A P T E R X L V.

SPIRITED AWAY !

ALL unaware of the evil tidings that were awaiting him, Denzil, stiff and well-nigh frozen, aching in every limb, staggered like a tipsy man to his feet, so sore and cramped were every joint and limb. As the dawn came slowly in, he gazed around him. Waller was already awake, and had been to look after his men. He proffered his cigar-case, saying :—

“ Have a weed, Devereaux—it's all the breakfast you are likely to get. We are as ill off here as Mother Hubbard's ill-used cur.”

“ Are the ladies stirring yet ? ” asked Denzil, with chattering teeth.

“ No ; and Lady Sale has not had the bullet extracted from her arm yet.”

Once or twice during the dark hours that were passed, a little hand, cased in lavender kid, and drawn from a warm fur-lined riding-gauntlet, had come out from under the wall of the tent, and Waller's lips had touched it, for it was Mabel's ; and, gloved

though it was, the touch of that little hand, especially under circumstances so terrible, made big Bob Waller's honest heart to vibrate with emotion. Once Rose, in her old spirit of waggery, had put out her hand in the same way, and laughed when Waller, who was just dosing off to sleep in the wretched cold without, kissed it with great *empressement*; for she, too, wore pale lavender kids under her riding-gloves.

"Look round, Waller," said Denzil, as he lit the cigar; "did you ever behold such a scene?"

"Never—and hope never to see such again!"

The lofty mountains and impending rocks that overhung the pass, and that fatal route back to the hills of Siah Sung, being covered with snow, looked singularly close and nigh. The sky was clear now; and far as the eye could reach the way was studded by the dead bodies of human beings, camels, horses, baggage, yaboos, artillery bullocks, cannon and waggons, drums, weapons and abandoned dhoories, the inmates of which might be either living or dead; the latter most probably, for everything there lay half buried in the white winding-sheet of winter, with the black vultures settling in flights over them.

In the immediate vicinity of where Denzil stood, many men who in the night had perished of cold and exhaustion, lay frozen hard and firmly to the earth, with their muskets beside them. The corpses of the Hindoos and dusky Bengal sepoys seemed like pale Venetian bronze in the frosty air. In the eyes of the survivors, by over tension of the nerves, and the fierce wild excitement they had undergone for some time past, but more particularly during the preceding day and night, a keen and unearthly glare or glitter was visible. Each was aware of this hunted-expression as he looked in the worn face of his comrade. General Trecarrel seemed to be sorely changed by the sharp anxiety he suffered for his daughters' safety. Thus the usually bluff and florid looking old soldier had become pale, wan and haggard in face, and wild and defiant in eye, like the rest.

Sergeant Treherne, a powerful and hardy Cornishman, had tumbled a dead Hindoo out of a wooden litter, and breaking it to pieces, made with them a fire near the tent of the ladies, for whom, with all a campaigner's readiness, he was quickly preparing some hot coffee in a camp-kettle, whilst the old General, his countryman, sought to warm himself by the blaze, when the voice of Mabel startled all who were near, as she hurried from the tent, exclaiming,

"Papa—papa—where is Rose—is not she with you?"

Denzil started forward, but paused, for at the same instant Audley Trevelyan, who had been fraternally sharing some *dhal* (split-peas) with his horse, and of whose interference he felt

nervously jealous, sprang towards Mabel enquiringly. General Trecarrel stared at her with an air of utter bewilderment, as he had not seen Rose since the tent was pitched for the use of her and others on the troops halting, when she came as usual to be kissed by him before retiring, just as she had been wont to do ever since childhood.

Then he said hoarsely :

" Speak at once, Mabel—what has happened—speak ?"

But Mabel could only clasp her hands. She thought Rose had been with him, and terror now tied her tongue ; she dared not speak or question him, for "any suspense is better than *some* certainties ;" and one fact was here certain and palpable ; that Rose had left the tent unseen, and none knew why, wherefore or with whom !

When so many were perishing hourly by the most terrible deaths, we are shocked to admit that, such is the selfishness of human nature, the fate of one girl, even though a pure European, did not create much excitement for any length of time, save among those more immediately interested in it ; and as the retreat was to recommence in an hour, there was not much time for the unrefreshed and starving troops investigating it. Moreover, the rear-guard of yesterday was to be the advanced one of to-day, as the army, if that disorganised multitude could so be called, was to move off in inverted order—the left in front.

Generosity, chivalry, and humanity, inspired Audley Trevelyan like many other officers to be up and doing something ; they scarcely knew what. Denzil felt heart-wrung and stupefied, while Waller, in addition to his own emotions, was alarmed for the effect this calamitous event might have on Mabel ; but General Trecarrel, together with the horror inspired by great anxiety and love, felt an ardour of intense hatred against the Afghans who had left from him his youngest born ; she, who from childhood had been his pet, and his stricken heart seemed full of unuttered prayers for her.

The entire camp was speedily searched ; not a trace could be found of the lost one. She could neither have gone nor been taken to the front, as the snow lay there pure as it had fallen, untrodden and unsullied by footsteps. To the rear then only could she be looked for. Such was the hasty report made to the unhappy father by Brigadier Shelton, Audley, and other officers who crowded about him.

The ladies were full of compassion and a terror that was not quite unselfish. What had happened ? If she had vanished thus mysteriously, whose fate might be next ? They trembled in the frosty morning wind as they gazed at each other ; but Mabel's beautiful face, by the terrible and haggard misery of its

expression, inspired them all with sympathy, and they grouped about her like a covey of frightened doves.

Like Denzil, she felt as if half her life—half herself, had suddenly passed away. A looker-on might have thought that the death-warrant of all had been written in an instant, for Denzil, Waller, Audley, Mabel, and poor General Trecarrel stared at each other in blank horror and amazement.

Death by the sword, the lance, and bullet ; death by cold, starvation, fire, sack, slaughter, and every horror incident to such a retreat, had been, and were even now, close around them ; but what unthought-of personal calamity was this ? Breathlessly, and almost void of all power of volition, father and child gazed at each other. Their eyes seemed to say, “Where is my daughter ?” “Where is my sister ?” But who was to explain this terrible mystery ?

Nine ladies, we have said, had crowded together in that small tent, sleeping closely side by side for warmth ; and the eight remaining admitted that they had slept soundly in the heavy slumber that comes of intense weariness and keen anxiety. Denzil, in his half-dreamy doze outside the tent, had been conscious of soldiers hovering near it, but thought they were simply seeking for food or fuel.

Happy, thoughtless, heedless Rose, with all her flirting and pretty coquettish ways—where was she now ? Dead, butchered, or dying in misery amid the snow, or a captive ; and if so, in whose hands ? A captive kept for worse than death, too probably ! It was an episode that was maddening to her sister ; to her old father, who loved her so tenderly ; to Denzil, who doted on her shadow, and whose heart was full of the memory of that happy day by the Lake of Istaliff ; to Waller, and all who had known and liked her, or laughed and danced with her in the happy time that was past.

“Oh, God !” murmured the poor General, half audibly, as he raised his eyes and tremulous hands upwards ; “give my child back to me, or take me to her ! Lord, Lord, let me not go mad !” he added piteously. “To find her lying dead would be better than to be thus ignorant of her fate—of her sufferings—of her *end* !”

Life seemed to die out of his heart ; yet he breathed and lived, and had speech and hearing left.

“Those scoundrels who levanted in the dark, the Shah’s Sixth, have something to do with this,” said Burgoyne ; “they furnished the chain of sentinels towards the rear.”

“Right,” exclaimed the General hoarsely, “and in the rear must she be sought.”

“The enemy are already in motion and in sight,” said

Brigadier Shelton, who was examining the distant portion of the pass through his field-glass.

"I care not if all Afghanistan was there," said Trecarrel, mounting ; "come with me, Trevlyan ! Ladies, I entreat you to look to Mabel while I go in search of my lost one."

"Papa, papa," implored Mabel, "don't leave me."

"You are safe for the time," he replied, checking his horse for an instant ; "but I must go in search of my lost darling—to find her, or to die."

And now the old man rode wildly to the rear, followed by Audley, who had to ride with caution among the frozen dead and other *debris*, as the horses were ill-roughed, the *Nalbunds*, or native farriers, having all deserted.

"Captain Waller," cried Brigadier Shelton, "this is mere madness ; Trecarrel and Trevlyan are throwing their lives away, for the Afghan skirmishers will soon be close at hand ! Take your company to the rear in extended order, and keep the rascals in check if you can. A Ressallah of the 5th Cavalry will support you if necessary."

"Very good, sir," replied Waller mechanically and coolly, as if on parade, lowering his drawn sword in salute, and obeying with alacrity, in the desire and hope to overtake and protect the father of his Mabel. "Company, forward, double quick ;" and forward his men went briskly, with their arms at the trail, and in line, till clear of the bivouac, when he extended them from the centre, and they loaded while advancing.

In active and dangerous military duty like this, there is always some relief from mental torture. A man in grief may sit at his desk, toil with the spade, the shuttle, or the hammer, enduring a sickness of the heart that nothing can allay, and time alone may cure ; but in the fierce excitement of mortal strife, the ills of life seem lessened, and a great sorrow may be half forgotten. Hence, to grapple with the enemy, and especially such an enemy as those Afghans, was as a balm to the excited hearts of Denzil and Waller, and forth they went with a will over ground that was singularly repulsive and horrible in aspect. In his keen sense of the terrible event of last night, the former forgot even his jealousy of Audley ; they could have but one common cause now—vengeance on the abductors.

Corpses lay thick everywhere, and half covered by the snow.

How terrible seemed the last rest of all those dead people, who, since only yesterday, had learned the great secret of Time and Eternity, and more than mere mortal can ever know ; their jaws relaxed ; their eyes, unclosed by friendly or loving hands, were staring stonily and sightlessly to Heaven, as they slept the sleep from which the thunder of all the cannon in the world

would never waken them. The ashes of the Christian would receive no Christian burial ; and those of the Hindoo would never mingle with the waters of the Jumna, or his holier river, the Ganges. For the remains of all would ere long become the prey of the wolf and hyæna, and already the vultures were there in sable flights, settling over all the fallen.

In some places under the soldiers' feet, the snow was crimsoned by large patches of frozen blood.

A long line of abandoned dhooleys, full of women, children, and wounded men, were passed. All the occupants of these were dead ; and to their ghastly banquet thereon, the scared vultures returned with angry croak and flapping wings, when Waller's men went further from them.

On a little knoll the General and Audley Trevelyan were overtaken. They had reined up their horses, and were looking about them sadly and hopelessly, for no trace of the lost one could be discerned ; but the shouts of some exulting Afghans were borne towards them on the morning wind.

A body of cavalry, divided into two parties, were coming along the steep rocks of the pass on both sides, for the mountain horses of that wild region can climb like cats or goats. A green silk banner floated from a glittering lance, announcing that they formed the Resallah, or troop of Amen Oollah Khan ; and each horseman had a juzailchee, or rifleman, mounted, *en croupe*, behind him, after the fashion of the French Voltigeurs.

These they dropped fresh, unwearied, and ready for action ; and the firing began at once from behind the rocks or stones, over which they discharged their long barrelled rifles in perfect security.

The Afghans are excellent skirmishers, and their native juzails carry much farther than our regulation muskets ; thus, before Waller's men could return their fire, one of his corporals uttered a yell of agony, bounded a yard from the ground, and then fell flat on his face, dead. A bullet had pierced a mortal part.

"Close up—close up, forward," cried Waller, leading them on, sword in hand ; "those devils have got our range exactly now."

While he spoke the bullets were sowing thick the snow about General Trecarrel and Audley, who being mounted men, were prominent figures. Meanwhile the horsemen had disappeared ; but the wily Amen Oollah was merely making a *detour* to turn the flank of a group of pines that grew upon the steep slope, intending thereby to get into the rear of Waller's skirmishers and cut them off.

"Get under cover, lads, as best you may !" cried he, as his bugler sounded to "commence firing ;" and with a dark, stern, and desperate expression in their hungry faces, his soldiers knelt

behind rocks and stones, dead horses and camels, dhooleys and abandoned baggage-boxes, and proceeded to return the fire of the Afghans (about a hundred in number), who were taking quiet pot-shots at any head that appeared above the snow-clad rocks, behind which they were lurking.

Now and then a fiend-like yell, and a pair of brown booted feet, or swarthy dark hands appearing wildly in the air, announced when an English bullet found its billet in a Mussulman body; and then the soldiers smiled grimly to each other, as they thought "there is one the less in the world, at all events."

This serious musketry practice, and the wailing of women and children, were the only morning *reveillé* in that melancholy halting place on the bank of the Loghur.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SKIRMISH.

GRATITUDE to General Trecarrel, who had been kind to his dead mother, to Sybil, and ever so to himself, with a natural regard for the old soldier as the father of Rose, made Denzil linger near him, and beseech him to retire and not to expose his life needlessly. Absorbed in his great grief the General made no reply ; with his face pale, his eyes bloodshot, and his teeth set, he sat on horseback and watched the turns of the skirmish.

The juzailchees fired with deadly aim as they levelled their long weapons over rests, or the rocks behind which they were crouching ; thus some ten or twelve of Waller's skirmishers had fallen ; of these five were dead, and others were creeping wounded to the halting place, which some of them were not destined to reach, as they died of exhaustion, loss of blood, or another bullet by the way.

His company continued to advance steadily by front and rear-rank files alternately, each man darting forward and getting under the cover of some rock or *bedana* (as the wild mulberry bushes are named) till they were all within half musket shot of the foe. The reports of the firing were reverberated among the snow-clad cliffs, tossed from peak to peak, and so often repeated, that it seemed as if four times the number of men were engaged ; but though each soldier had forty rounds of ammunition when leaving the Cantonments, cartridges were failing already, for their stiffened and frost-bitten fingers dropped more than they discharged, so that the living had soon to supply themselves from the pouches of the dead.

Suddenly a cry of pain escaped General Trecarrel, and he fell heavily from his horse, which swerved madly round, and fled into the pass, with saddle reversed and bridle trailing. An exclamation of mingled rage and commiseration left the lips of Waller, who glanced back hastily in the humane hope that Mabel did not see this calamity, of which, however, she was so soon to hear.

A ball had pierced her father's body, going fairly through the chest and back, and he was dying in mortal agony, with the blood welling from his mouth and nostrils.

"Rose—Rose and—Mabel!" he muttered, as he slowly lifted his empty arms upward in the air, and then turning fairly round with his face to the snow, amid which his white hair mingled, he expired.

The whole catastrophe occurred in less time than is taken to write of it.

"How shall I break this fresh sorrow to poor Mabel!" said Waller, in a low voice, through his clenched teeth; but he had little time for reflection now, as a shout on the right flank announced the approaching Horse of Amen Oollah Khan, as they swept tumultuously round the pine wood, and came on at a hand-gallop, down ground that was frightfully steep.

"Rally—close to the centre—form company square!" cried Waller, holding his sword aloft. He looked to the rear; the promised support from the 5th Cavalry was not to be seen; but he heard a bugle in the camp sounding the "retire," thus recalling his skirmishers, a most necessary measure, as a body of more than six hundred Horse, led, as it eventually proved, by Ackbar Khan in person, were now advancing through the pass.

Waller's company formed a rallying square, and began to retire, still firing, however, while Denzil, assisted by Sergeant Treherne, endeavoured to bring off the body of General Trecarrel, by placing it across the horse of Audley, who had dismounted for that purpose. This caused a delay which proved fatal, as it separated them from their party. Twice the poor corpse slipped from the saddle, and they were in the act of replacing it for a third time, when, with a yell of,

"*Shookr-Foor wustie!*" (Praise be to God) four Afghan horsemen, riding far in advance of their comrades, were down upon them.

One of these, a gigantic fellow, wearing a flaming yellow head-dress, and a scarlet *chogah* or cloak, struck off Audley's cocked hat, and grasping him viciously by the hair, dragged his head close to the saddle-lap, intending to cut it off by a slash of his long knife. Audley ran his sword into the bowels of this barbarian's horse. It reared furiously, and threw the rider, whose

hold never relaxed, for he and Audley rolled over each other in close and deadly grapple, till Denzil passed his sword through the quivering body of the Afghan—a task which he had to repeat twice, as such fellows are hard to kill, ere he could release and save his kinsman.

Sergeant Treherne shot the second and bayoneted the third, a thrust from whose lance he narrowly escaped; but the fourth, whom a stray shot from the still retiring square had dismounted and wounded in the sword-arm, cried imploringly on his knees,

“*Aman! aman!*” (quarter—quarter), so Denzil arrested the charged bayonet of Treherne, which in another moment would have pinned him to the earth.

“Retire—retire, I command you both,” cried Waller, whose voice was distant now.

“Thank heaven, Audley Trevelyan, I have repaid Sybil’s debt to you—we are quits at last,” was Denzil’s thought, and he was turning away to hasten after the Company, for not a moment could be lost now, if he wished to save his own life, when suddenly he received a dreadful blow on the back part of the head—he heard the explosion of a pistol—the light went out of his eyes, or a darkness seemed to descend upon him; he fell forward on the snow with outspread hands, and remembered no more.

The wretch whose life he had just spared had felled him to the earth by a stroke from a ponderous iron-butted pistol, and then discharged it at Audley, without effect, however, as the ball missed its object.

Treherne, who by this time had reloaded shot the Afghan through the head, and then he and Audley Trevelyan had to run for their lives, as by this time the six Ressallahs of advancing Horse were close at hand, and cries of “*Ullah ul Alla*” loaded the frosty air.

“Poor Devereaux—gone with the rest!” exclaimed Polwhele.

“Yes,” said Waller. “how many a poor fellow, gayer and happier than he apparently was, goes into action, confidently believing the bullet is not yet cast that shall floor him, and is shot for all that.”

“Well—it may be our turn next, sir,” said Sergeant Treherne, philosophically.

Fain would Waller and the rest have made a rally to bring him off dead or alive, at the bayonet’s point, together with the body of Trecarrel; but the bugles of the rear-guard—first two, then four at once—were sounding, as if angrily, the order to *retire*; so to “retire” he was compelled, or sacrifice perhaps, his whole Company; and with tears in his eyes, where tears had not been since he was a child, in a white pinafore, at school, he drew off the survivors of the futile skirmish, and rejoined his brigade,

"Where is papa?" asked an agitated voice. It was Mabel who addressed him, her face whiter, if possible, than ever.

Waller pointed with his sword towards the pass, and mournfully shook his head.

"Wounded?"

"Oh, my darling—killed, and poor young Devereaux, too, I greatly fear."

Mabel heard him as if turned to stone. Rose gone, and now her father too! Poor Denzil she never thought of, for great grief is selfish at times.

"Dearest Mabel," said Waller, "I do not ask you to 'compose yourself,' as people always say in such cases; I am a bad comforter, perhaps—can't quote Scripture and all that sort of thing. The poor old man had not many years before him any way, and I can only implore you to submit to the will of God."

But she could only weep upon his breast, heedless of those around them.

"Where was he struck?" she asked, in a choking voice.

"I don't know," replied Waller, looking down.

"Did he die easily?"

"Yes."

Neither of these answers was true: but he knew that details would only harrow her feelings the more.

So the old General was left unburied in the pass, and Mabel was smoothing caressingly with her fingers and then treasuring in her bosom a thin lock of his silver hair, which Audley had cut for her, and which recalled the dead so powerfully in presence, as it were, that her heart seemed to brim with tears. There was no relic left of him now save this; unless we add a pair of his pipeclayed gloves, which he had given her to draw over her own for warmth, and somehow they too seemed to embody his presence, and to bring before her by their very shape the kind old hands that never tired of caressing her and Rose from infancy—the hands of him who was left without a grave in yonder fatal place, for the army was again in full retreat, and leaving, even as it left all yesterday, its dead and dying on every hand.

Audley thought with intense compassion of Sybil, whose previous bereavement he had learned from Waller; and all unused to grief, he rode among the Staff in a state of utter bewilderment, considering whether he should write her, and if so, in what terms he was to tell her of her loss.

For a time Mabel clung to Waller's neck, in her great despair of mind, like one in a dreadful bodily agony. She cared not for onlookers; for the men of the 44th, or the sepoy, with their black glossy wondering eyes.

"Oh, Waller ; I have no friend in the world now—no friend but you !" said she, in a strange and weak voice, as she laid her face, thinned and paled by grief and suffering, on his breast.

Waller's bright blue eyes were dry now ; but in their expression tenderness alternated with something akin to ferocity, for all this suffering, and all those deaths that were occurring hourly, were the result of Afghan treachery ; and his fair English face seemed to darken as he looked back to where Denzil, the General, and so many more were lying, and the interment of whom was impossible. The enemy was coming on, the bugles were sounding for the advance—if a retrograde movement can be called so—and already the whole force was *en route* towards Khoord Cabul.

Mabel was soon once more on horseback, and rode with the rest of the ladies, many of whom were widows now, and could share their grief with her.

Her heart had

"Fallen too low for special fear ;"

to her acute mental misery a kind of apathetic stupor followed, and she was in that state as the Retreat again began.



CHAPTER XLVII.

IN THE KHYBER PASS.

WE almost shrink from the task of telling the story of that awful retreat, in which the Rider on the Pale Horse followed the steps of our troops, so closely, so terribly, and in such ghastly triumph !

All the plans of Ackbar Khan had been long prearranged, and among those, as an intercepted despatch from him to a Ghilzie chief announced, was nothing less than a Holy War, for he adjured all, in the name of the Prophet, "to rise against the infidels, whose chief," he adds, "I have slain with my own hand at Cabul, even, as I trust, in like manner to slay the chief of the Feringhees, Sale, in Jellalabad."

The six hundred Horse that had been seen advancing, were met by two of our officers, Captain Skinner, of the 61st Native Infantry, and Lieutenant Burgoyne, who bore a flag of truce. They demanded what their intentions were ; and the fierce Ackbar who rode at their head, muffled in a robe of the costliest furs, played with the lock of a pistol, and seemed with difficulty to restrain himself from using it. However, he replied,

"I have come on the part of the great chiefs of Afghanistan, to escort you as far as Jellalabad ; but we demand hostages that you shall march no further on the way than Tezeen, ere Sale Sahib evacuates the city, wherein he has no right to be."

"Wherefore hostages, Khan ?" asked Captain Skinner.

"Lest when you effect a junction, you may all come back to Cabul. The lives of the hostages should answer for this, and I take *yours* in the meantime, as an earnest thereof !"

And as he spoke he drew his pistol, and deliberately shot poor Skinner through the head ; so Burgoyne, full of rage and pity, returned with the message alone.

Notwithstanding this new crime, other interviews took place, and ultimately Major Pottinger and two other officers were given up as hostages ; but all this pretended diplomacy was merely a trick on the part of Ackbar to cause delay, until he got the lower portion of the Khyber Pass manned completely by the armed tribes, and even barricaded by felled trees against our retreat, for the force was too slender now to admit of having skirmishes or scouting parties moving along the summits of the cliffs, collaterally with the retiring column.

"Yield who may," was the cry of Waller and many others, "we at least, as Englishmen, as British soldiers, shall fight our way through the passes with courage, discipline, and the fury of despair. All cannot perish ; come on, lads—forward !"

"Forward—steady, Jack Sepoy ;" the Queen's troops would call to those of the East India Company.

But it was now urged by the Sirdir, that the wild hordes in possession of the passes, and over whom he pretended to have no control, would destroy all the women and children ; and, fearing that such a calamity could only be escaped by some diplomacy and an affectation of trust in Ackbar, General Elphinstone, then at the point of death, and therefore heedless what fate was in store for him, gave himself up as a hostage, together with most of the principal officers, the *whole* of the ladies, children, and wounded, who were immediately conveyed back to Cabul ; and the doomed army once more resumed its march, while famine and disease added to the horror of the occasion ; but when men destroy each other without pity, why should not Death come and lend them a hand ?"

The reader may imagine the emotions of Waller, of the officers, and other Europeans, when they saw their wives and daughters, or those they loved as well, separated from them, to become the hostages for a certain military movement, the guests, the captives—it might too probably be the victims—of a barbarian prince. Many may yet remember the fear, shame, and compassion this event, the sequel to a series of blunders, excited at home,

when tidings came of their abandonment, and the fate of our troops, whose terrible career we have scarcely the heart to follow.

The parting of Mabel and Waller was bitter, though in her soul the bitterness of death itself seemed past, and her tears were such as seem to come from the heart ; but others as well as she were parting from their dearest, and there is a strange communion in grief.

Ackbar conveyed his prizes back to the city, treating them with apparent kindness, for he considered white women nearly as valuable as the horses of the Usbec Tartars ; but by that time nearly all the babes at the breast and the little toddling things that made many a father proud and mother happy, had perished, even as the strong man perished, for in some places the snow was so deep, that soldiers disappeared bodily into it, and were never, never seen again.

Ackbar probably meant to keep them all till richly ransomed, for he was overheard to say to Amen Oollah Khan, in his hypocritical way,—

“ What saith the Koran ? ‘ Unto such of your slaves as desire a written instrument, allowing them to redeem themselves, on paying a certain sum, write one, if ye know good in them, and give them of the riches of God, which he hath given you.’ ”

“ But, by the soul of him who wrote these words,” replied Amen Oollah, “ I would not give up that damsel with the red, golden hair for less than a crore of rupees.”

As a crore is *ten* lacs of rupees, a high value seemed to be set on poor Mabel Trecarrel, who was here indicated.

In the deep shadowy gorges of those winding passes, through which the route of the troops lay for miles, the impending cliffs were covered by clouds of yellow-turbaned Khyberees and Ghilzies, who poured down upon them a remorseless and incessant fire of musketry, and in some places from caverns which were full of juzailchees. In others they daringly rushed in bands into the ranks of the weary and half-famished soldiers, whose ammunition was nearly expended, and made there a terrible use of their swords and long daggers ; and thus, at a place called the Jungle Tarehee, or Dark Pass, the whole of the 54th Native Infantry were destroyed. There, too, fell Graham and Ravelstoke.

The dead were always stripped, and then mutilated, or terribly gashed with wounds.

“ Death to the infidel dogs—death ! death !” were the incessant cries by which these fanatics inspired each other.

“ What says the Koran ? ” cried one whose camise was literally

steeped in blood ; “ ‘it is unlawful to plunder the living,’ but there is no prohibition about the dead ; so death to them all !”

The fugitives were so wedged *en masse* in the narrow way, that every shot told fearfully. All along that route, many a wounded soldier, as he fell behind, gave to some favourite comrade the last words that he, poor Bob, or Bill, or Jack, was never fated to carry home ; many a dying officer gave his papers, ring, or locket to the friend who, in a few minutes later, was also stretched on the ensanguined snow.

At one brief halt a few ponies were killed and devoured *raw* !

All hope was dead now in every heart, yet on they struggled —on, and on—till a place called Jugdulluck was reached, and then in all the sullenness of fury and despair, the wretched survivors, Horse, Foot, and Artillerymen, resolved to make a resolute stand. Cheering wildly, as if to welcome death and the foe together, the poor fellows stood shoulder to shoulder, many bleeding with undressed wounds, all breathless and flushed, their eyes gleaming, their once comely English faces distorted by hate and bitterness.

In sheets of lead the heavy juzail balls tore through them on every hand, and they fell faster than ever. Her Majesty’s 44th Regiment was now reduced to two hundred men, and every man of the two hundred perished where he stood. But this bravery enabled some of the other corps to proceed further, and the last final stand was made by those unhappy men on the morning of the 13th January, on the knoll of Gundamuck, when twenty officers, sixty soldiers, and three hundred camp-followers alone survived.

Polwhele was the first who fell here ; two balls pierced his chest ; and there, too, perished all that remained of Waller’s Company. If the fire slackened a moment, the clash of knife and bayonet was heard, with many a yell and groan.

“ Dear Bob,” cried Polwhele to Waller, as he lay choking in blood, “ if you cannot carry me out of the field, take my sword and this ring for my—my poor mother.”

But Waller could do neither, for over Polwhele’s body there thickly fell a heap of killed and wounded.

After his ammunition was expended, Sergeant Trcherne, whom rage and desperation inspired with a fury resembling madness, laid wildly about him, and with the heel of his musket dashed out the brains of more than one tall Afghan. This stalwart son of the Mines had come of a race that in their time had been greater men than miners in Cornwall—*Huelwers*, who were rulers then in the land before, perhaps, a stone of Windsor or Westminster had been laid ; and now he stood like a hero on that fatal knoll of Gundamuck, beating down the foe with the

butt-end of his clubbed weapon, till he fell, riddled with bullets upon the corpses of his comrades.

Seeing all lost, Waller, his heart swollen almost to bursting, had now to seek his own safety. Concealed by the smoke and some wild pistachio trees, he found shelter in a cavern, though fearing that traces of his footsteps in the snow might lead to his discovery, and there he lay on the cold rocky floor, more dead than alive with excess of emotion and all he had undergone, panting, feeble, and well-nigh breathless.

He had only his sword now, and even if he escaped the Afghans, wolves, bears, or hyænas—the mountains teemed with all of them—might come upon him in the night.

Being well mounted, Audley Trevelyan and two medical officers effected their escape, but were closely pursued by Amen Oollah Khan, and compelled to separate. One was overtaken and slain within four miles of Jellalabad. Audley's horse was shot under him, and he concealed himself till nightfall in a *nullah* or ravine.*

The despatches record that of all the sixteen thousand five hundred who marched from the Cantonments of Cabul, ninety miles distant, Dr. Brydone, a Scottish medical officer of the Shah's service, bleeding, faint, covered with wounds, and carrying a broken sword in his hand, *alone* reached the city of Sir Robert Sale's garrison; but Trevelyan came in four hours after, to confirm his terrible tidings of the total destruction of our army and all its followers, for all who were not slain were made slaves by the captors.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

WALLER'S ADVENTURES.

“RUN to earth at last!” groaned Bob Waller, whose subsequent perils were so varied and remarkable that they alone, if fully detailed, might fill a volume.

In that cavern or fissure, one of the many which abound in

* At Gundamuck “the enemy rushed in with drawn knives, and with the exception of *two* officers and *four* men, the whole of this doomed band fell victims to the sanguinary mob.”—*Memorials of Afghanistan*, Calcutta, 1843.

Long prior to this event, Colonel Dennie, of the 13th, made a curiously prophetic speech. “His words were, ‘you'll see that not a soul will escape from Cabul except *one* man, and he will come to tell us that the rest are destroyed.’”—*Sale's Brigade*.

Ackbar Khan is said to have uttered a similar prediction.

the rocks there, he lay the whole day, untraced and undiscovered, for the Afghans, after having stripped and mutilated in their usual fashion, the dead on the snow-covered knoll, had retired. He knew that he was only sixteen miles from that bourne they had all hoped to reach—Sale's little garrison in Jellalabad, and that if he ever attained it at all, the attempt must be made in the night. He was without a guide ; he knew not the way, and his dress and complexion would render him to every shepherd, wayfarer, and marauding horseman, apparent, as a Feringhee and an enemy.

The whole affair, the retreat, and the result of it, seems to be what a French writer describes as “one of those especial visitations of Fate, which draw on the devoted to their ruin, and which it is impossible for virtue to resist, or human wisdom to foresee.”

After seven days and nights of incessant fighting ; after the perpetual ringing of musketry, the yells of the Afghans, the varied cries of those who perished in agony under their hands ; after all the truly infernal uproar and mad excitement in those dark and narrow passes, the unbroken silence around him now, seemed intense and oppressive. He could almost imagine that he heard it ; stirred though it was only by the low hum of insect life among the withered leaves and *coss*, or wild mountain grass, that lay drifted by the wind in heaps within the cave, and on which he lay so sad and weary

“Now,” thought he, after some hours had passed, “now that this horrible row is all over, I'll have a quiet weed—smoke a peaceful calumet of cavendish ;” and he drew the materials therefore from the pocket of his poshteen.

Waller had always been solicitous about the colouring of that same calumet, as he styled his meerschaum pipe, which, by the bye, had been a gift from his friend Polwhele—poor Jack Polwhele—who was lying under that ghastly pile of dead on the knoll, where his jovial soul had ebbed through his death-wound, and where in his kind heart, and on his pallid lips, as he breathed his last, his mother's name had mingled with that of his God ;—and so, as Waller smoked amid the silence and gloom of the wintry eve, tears rolled over his cheek—the bitter tears of a brave man's rage and grief.

This was not war but carnage !

To Waller it seemed as if a gory curtain had fallen between him and all his past life. Where were now his companions of the parade, the mess, and the race-course ? Where the brave rank and file, that had stood by him shoulder to shoulder, and every man of whom deemed Captain Waller a friend, as much as an officer ? Where were the faces and voices of all he had

known and loved? As he lay there alone in cold and darkness, his emotions were somewhat akin to those described as being felt by the *last man*, when the whitening skeletons of nations were around him, and when all the human world had—himself excepted—passed away.

“Mabel and Rose—my own Mabel, where is *she*? ” he muttered again and again.

Love left his heart with her; she was, like others, a hostage—a thing unheard of in modern wars;—a prisoner—too probably a victim! In such terrible hands, what worse fate could she have? She had been diplomatically torn from him, by a treaty that proved futile, and which cast dishonour on our arms. Duty had compelled him to march with his men; for the stern duty of the soldier had to rise superior to the soft affection of the lover, and now he was there alone, with the memory of her last tearful kiss lingering on his lips.

“My beautiful darling—my loved, my lost Mabel!” murmured the usually matter-of-fact Waller; “oh, why were you left from me? God,” he added, looking up imploringly in the gathering gloom, “shall we ever meet again?”

He knew that no fear of future vengeance would deter the Afghans from committing any outrage on their captives. In their utter ignorance of the locality, the nature, and vast resources of Britain, they can form no correct idea of her power by sea or land. They vaguely know all Europe by the general term of Feringhistan, or the Country of the Franks; and that ships from there come to Bombay and Bassora (the Bassora of Sindbad the Sailor), to Madras, and Calcutta; and that a Queen rules one portion of it—a dreary island somewhere in the sea; and their learned *Moollahs* were wont to assert, that her red soldiers, by their close resemblance to each other, the extreme similarity of their uniform and motions, must all be the sons of one mother.

An intense thirst, which successive handfuls of snow failed to allay, hunger, and extreme cold from lying so long in that dark den in such a season, made Waller hail the descending night, and with sombre satisfaction he quitted his lurking place, to seek on foot the road to Jellalabad.

“In England,” thought he, “the Poor Law guardians have studied at times to discover upon how little mankind can be kept alive; and there have been learned philosophers who declared it possible for people to exist without food at all! By Jove, I wish they had been on this retreat from Cabul, and all their problems would soon have been solved.”

He heard now the voices of the jackals revelling over their ghastly meal on the hill of Gundamuck, and shudderingly he

turned away in the opposite direction. Snow covered all the country ; but the footsteps and horse tracks of those who had pursued Doctor Brydone were, for a time, a sufficient indication of the route he was to follow. He had lost his shako in the late conflict, but the loonghee of a dead Afghan supplied its place.

The night was clear ; the deep blue sky was full of brilliant stars ; around him the stupendous mountains of the Khyber range towered on either side of the way in silence and solemnity, that proved something awful to the then oppressed mind of the poor fugitive, who wished from his soul that he had been as dark in complexion and as black of eye as his friend Polwhele ; for Waller's face and hair were of the thorough Saxon type, and hence any attempt to pass himself off as a fair-visaged Oriental was impossible, for swarthy indeed is the fairest of them. He had never possessed such a hand-book as "Afghani before breakfast," or "without a master," if such a thing ever existed ; but he had contrived to pick up enough of the strange polyglot medley forming the language of the natives, to have aided any disguise, could he have found one.

Voices and the clatter of hoofs, the latter partially deadened by the snow, fell on his ear, before he had proceeded a mile ; and, on the whiteness that stretched in distance far away before him, appeared the dark figures of a group of mounted men approaching rapidly.

Near the roadside there stood, and doubtless still stands, a little musjid, or temple, and over its tiny dome one giant poplar towered skyward, like a dark gothic spire. The strangers might halt and pray there, profuse piety being an element in the Afghan character ; but it was equally probable they might not ; so, as it was his only hope of concealment, he hastened to avail himself of it—but too late ; he was already observed, and a series of wild shouts made his heart sicken, as the horsemen came galloping up, unslinging from their backs their long juzails as they advanced.

These people proved to be Amen Oollah Khan, a warrior known as Zohrab Zubberdust (*i. e.*, the overbearing), and others, who had that forenoon pursued Doctor Brydone almost to the gates of Jellalabad, and, on the way, murdered his hapless companion, Doctor Harper, whose horse had failed him within four miles of the city. They were richly accoutred ; each had a gilded shield slung on his back, and wore a round steel cap, furnished with a flap of chain-mail covering the neck, and two upright points, like spear heads, that glittered in the starlight.

"Death to the Kaffir ! death to the Feringhee !" they cried with one accord.

"I am no Kaffir," replied Waller, (standing on the steps of

the musjid, and ready to sell his life dearly), "but a Mussulman, like yourselves."

"Liar, and son of a liar ! I see the dress of a red Feringhee under your poshsteen," said Amen Oollah, and in succession he, Yohrab, and two others, snapped their matchlocks at him ; but they had become so foul by recent and incessant use, that the balls had been forced down with difficulty, the powder and matches were alike damp, and fortunately not one would explode.

"Hah !" said Waller, with great presence of mind, though fearing he might be recognised by Amen Oollah, who had frequently seen him in the streets of Cabul, "you see that the hand of the Prophet interposes, and does not permit you to kill me."

"We shall soon prove that," replied the Khan, unsheathing his sabre ; but impressed, nevertheless, by what seemed the genuine belief in fatalism, which is a peculiarity of the Mohammedian faith ; so he deliberately placed the edge on Waller's throat, and said—

"To the proof of what you assert. If you are a Mussulman, repeat the *Kulma*; if in one word, however small, you fail, your head and heels shall lie together on the snow."

Waller had his own sword drawn, and was prepared to run it through the heart of Amen Oollah if he felt himself failing. It was a critical moment ; he knew that the edge of an Afghan sabre was sharp as a razor ; he felt that he was never born to be a religious martyr ; so thinking in his heart—as, perhaps, the great Galileo thought, when in the bonds of the Inquisition—

"May God forgive me!" by a little stretch of memory he repeated the entire *Kulma*, or creed of Mohammed, on which Amen Oollah seemed satisfied, and sheathed his sword. But now Zorab Zubberdust, a handsome and dashing Afghan gentleman, one of those soldiers of fortune who possessed only his sword and his horse, and thus served Ackbar Khan for three rupees per diem, said,—

"Khan Sahib, how comes a true believer to have a face and beard so fair?"

"A Persian taught me to dye my beard yellow ; and as for my face, I am a Turk of Stamboul," replied Waller, boldly.

As not one of them had ever seen a Turk of Feringhistan, these answers seemed to perplex them.

"Then why here ?" asked Zorab, suspiciously.

"I served Shah Sujah, and have left him, for fate is against him, and he shall never reign in Afghanistan," said Waller, thinking in his heart, "How many falsehoods must I tell to deceive these artful savages ?"

"You are right," said Amen Oollah, grimly ; "but as we deem

that in serving the Shah you have been guilty of a crime, I give you as a slave to Nouradeen Lal. You shall help him to plough the land."

"Salaam and thanks, Khan Sahib—I have need of a sturdy servant, as I shot one in a fit of passion lately," said a horseman, a powerfully built and venerable looking Afghan, to whose horse-girth Waller speedily found himself attached by a rope which was passed round his waist. To resist, would be simply to court death; and he was thus conducted, a prisoner, into a valley of the mountains. In fact, his captors were probably too glutted with slaughter to kill him, and so spared him for the time. But he felt that his existence would be at the caprice of his owner, Nouradeen Lal, whose first act of power was to take away his regimental sword and belt, after another acquisitive Afghan had possessed himself of his gold repeater, his purse and rings.

"What fools, and sons of burnt fathers, you Feringhees were to come among us here in Afghanistan, to put upon our throne a king we loathed, in lieu of Dost Mohammed," said Nouradeen, as they proceeded; "you will now know how true it is, that though two Dervishes may sleep on one carpet, two kings cannot reign in one kingdom. But the will of God be done! The whole world depends upon fate and fortune. It is one man's destiny to be depressed—the other's to be exalted."

"Canting old humbug!" thought Waller, who learned ere long that his agricultural owner was especially a man of proverbs, like Sancho Panza.

The farmer, and two other horsemen, with much ceremony bade adieu to Amen Oollah Khan; but the latter only waved his hand and said—

"Adieu till we meet again—most likely before Jellalabad," and, with his armed followers, galloped into that terrible pass, where an entire army, with all its débris, strewed the way for miles upon miles, back even unto the gates of the burned cantonments.

"So those rascals think of beating up Sale's garrison," thought Waller, with reference to the parting words of the Khan.

As Nouradeen entered the hedgerows which bordered the compounds of his farm-house and yard, he unslung his juzail, which seemed in somewhat better order than those of his companions, and, wheeling half round in his saddle, fired a shot rearward, Parthian-wise, and brought down a large eagle that was soaring high in mid air.

"Steel commands everything, and now in addition to the steel—the swords and lances of our forefathers—we have bullets, praised be God!" he exclaimed, flourishing his clumsy old

matchlock, exactly such a weapon as might have figured at Marston Moor, or the field of Kilsythe.

Perceiving that the shot excited Waller's admiration, he drew a long brass pistol from his girdle, urged his horse to full speed, and a picturesque figure he seemed, with his flowing robes and magnificent beard floating on the wind. He then threw a lemon over his head, and, twisting his body completely round to the left, fired at it from the off flank of his horse, and pierced it as it was in the act of falling.

"Now," said he, with a grim smile, "should you attempt to escape without ransom, my ball will follow you thus surely—yea, did go far as the arrow of Arish, which was shot at sunrise, and did not fall till sunset. A soldier, you should remember, that even were you to conquer all the world, death at last will conquer you."

"It is unlawful to make a slave of a true believer," said Waller.

"One may repeat the Kulma, and not be a very true believer after all," replied the shrewd old Afghan, with a gleam of intense cunning in his glittering eyes; "nay, nor even a Turk of Roum," he added, meaning Constantinople; and hence Waller knew that he was suspected.

The farmer's wife—Nouradeen Lal had but one helpmate—saw how pale and wan their prisoner looked, and speedily set some food before him, a pillau of rice, dhye (or sour curds), odious stuff, which he ate with his fingers in the fashion of the country. One or two of "Malcolm's plums" (as the Persians and Afghans call the potato), with a little ghee or clarified butter, completed his simple repast. As he ate, falling to without uttering "Bismillah" an omission which his captors did not fail to remark, he thought that cookery must be a sublime science at home—a veritable branch of the fine arts; but hunger is ever an excellent seasoning to any meal.

The snow had now begun to melt fast, and for four days Waller was kept a close prisoner, without a chance of escape, though he brooded over it incessantly, and writhed in spirit to be thus detained from his duty in Jellalabad, where doubtless the task of vengeance—it might be the deliverance of the unhappy hostages—had already begun. Besides, he was intensely bored by the hypocrisy of having to enact the part of Mussulman, by the pretended prayers and genuflexions, upon a piece of coarse felt, for the old man Nouradeen watched him closely. In all this Waller salved his conscience by the conviction that one is scarcely answerable for an act committed under a power one cannot resist.

On the morning of the fifth day the hills appeared in all their

greenery ; the sunshine was bright, and the atmosphere was clear and calm.

"The snow is gone," said Nouradeen ; "when spring comes the bones of your people will be whitening like ivory among the long green grass in the passes of the Khyber and Khoord Cabul."

These words came fearfully and literally true, as the Afghans never interred one of the slain.

"But sit not there so moodily," he added to Waller ; "grieve not over that which is broken, lost or burnt ; after prayer we go to plough ; come with me."

"Willingly," replied Waller, and his breast filled with a hope that was soon extinguished ; for when he found himself between the stilts of the Afghan plough, which was of the most primitive construction, and drawn by two oxen—a machine of the mode of working which he was utterly ignorant—he perceived a little old humpbacked fellow, armed with a loaded juzail, watching all his movements, and with an expression of face which showed how much he longed for some sign of an attempt to escape, and Waller, remembering the skill of the farmer with *his* firearms, resolved not to risk it.

He managed to direct the team, and for a few hours it occupied his mind. Waller ploughing !—Waller, the crack man, the pattern officer, the best round-dancer in the Cornish Light Infantry—he felt the situation to be intensely ludicrous, and he could have laughed but for the circumstances the situation represented—and the dreadful doubt that hung over the fate of Mabel, of Rose, and others ; and frequently he paused and looked wistfully towards the hills, as he thought that, but for yonder old Mohammedan beast, with his cocked matchlock, he should make a clean pair of heels and be off. Anyway, through his ignorance of the task in hand, and the pre-occupation of his thoughts, Bob's furrows had all the curved line of beauty, and would have made a Scottish ploughman, so vain of his straight lines, faint on the spot.

So the fifth day passed and he had but one thought, the yearning to see Mabel, with the haunting terror of all she might be enduring, and that he might never see her more !

Learning by chance that he was to be secured to the plough by an iron chain the next day, he determined that, come what might, he should escape in the night. Unarmed, he had but his courage and strategy to rely upon, in a country where all men's hands were against the European, where the laws have little force, and where whatever morality there is among the people, it depends entirely upon their religious sentiments and their attachment to their khans or chiefs. Two hundred years ago, an

Englishman might have found himself in pretty much the same predicament in some parts of the Scottish Highlands.

On examining the chimney of the apartment in which he was confined, he found that although the barred windows defied egress and ingress alike, he might achieve a passage to the external air by removing the bricks of unburnt clay, of which the wall was composed. He proceeded to pick out the lime with a nail softly, after darkness had set in, and after removing one, the cold night breeze from the Khyber hills blew gratefully upon his flushed face.

Another and another were speedily removed now, and in less than half an hour—during which he frequently paused with a palpitating heart, lest he might make some unlucky sound or be discovered by old Lal—he had achieved an aperture wide enough by which to creep out. He did so, and drew a long breath, as if he respiration more freely now. All was still, and the darkness was profound as the silence, and a prayer of thankfulness rose to the lips of Waller, as he quitted the compound around the farmer's establishment and hastened towards the hills, with the full knowledge that in whatever direction he went, some hours must elapse before his flight could be discovered, and there was no snow by which to track his footsteps.

CHAPTER XLIX.

CHANCE BETTER THAN DESIGN.

HE was unarmed, but he never thought of the wild animals which abound on the hills and in the forests of Afghanistan. Lions are rare ; but tigers, hyænas, bears, and wolves are plentiful enough, and the terrible passes of the Khyber mountains had peculiar attractions for the latter now. Yet Waller's sole anxiety was to avoid, not these, but their rivals in cruelty, the natives.

He had no guide ; but he knew, by the way the range of mountains rose between him and the sky, that the great plain or vale, wherein Jellalabad is situated, and which has an average breadth of ten miles, must, when he quitted the farm-gate, lie on his right hand and not on his left. Other indication he had none, and he set out in the hope of being within sight of its walls by daybreak, or at least soon after.

The improved appearance of the highway as he proceeded, afforded proof that it led to some large city, and he pressed on with a confident and hopeful heart, sometimes between orchards

containing a profusion of apple, plum, quince, and pomegranate trees, which the coming summer should see in full bloom and bearing. Now and then, softly, almost breathlessly, he would pass the skirts, but never through the straggling street, of a village, such being usually closed at each end by gates ; and occasionally he crossed a little brawling stream, a tributary of the Cabul, spanned by pretty bridges of stone, ornamented with tiny towers at each end.

Anon some pariah dog, prowling out of doors—for the poor dog is in great disrepute among Mohammedans—would bay out upon the night breeze, causing him to pause and shrink for concealment close to the nearest tree or hedgerow. And now with growing hope and heartiness, he had proceeded from the mountain-farm fully five *coss*, or ten English miles, on the Jellalabad road when day began to dawn on the mighty peaks of the Khyber range, and the ruddy sunlight stole gradually down their slopes into the gloomy passes and rocky ravines which intersect and separate them.

When day was fairly in, Waller began to think of seeking a place of concealment till night again fell, when he felt certain that a few miles more along that open highway must eventually bring him to some gate of Jellalabad ; but an abrupt turn of the road brought him suddenly upon a village, the gates of which stood open. There in the little street some armed horsemen were grouped around a well, and many people were astir previous to departing to their work in the fields ; for all the country there is beautifully cultivated, and ever covered by a profusion of the richest vegetation.

He was seen ; there was a shout—spurs were applied to the horses, flight was impossible, and in half a minute he was again a prisoner, the lances levelled at his throat menacing him with death.

“A Kaffir—a Feringhee ! kill him, kill him !” cried the villagers, male and female, as they crowded in wild tumult around him ; even the tawny children raised their little hands against the weary wanderer, for the place was the abode of Ghazees, the wildest of Mohammedan fanatics.

“Bismillah ! there is *one* yet alive !” exclaimed a horseman.

“But what said Ackbar Khan?—may the sun be his star, the new moon his stirrup-iron—one was to be left to tell the tale,” exclaimed another, mercifully interposing his lance between Waller and the others ; “and this is he.”

“Nay one Kaffir has already got into Jellalabad—it is enough ; let us have this one’s head,” was the general cry which rose to a mingled yell, and dark eyes flashed, and white teeth were ground around him. So poor Waller began to fear that he was the

"last man" after all, and worse off than when ploughing for old Nouradeen Lal. However, he kept close to the young chief who seemed disposed to protect him, and who was accoutred with a steel cap and shield.

"The Prophet wrote at birth on each man's brow the day he was to die, and your time is to-day, O Kaffir!" exclaimed one, making a vicious thrust with his gaily tasselled lance, which, had it not been struck up by his protector's hand, had ended Waller's career there and then."

"What business has a dog of a Feringhee with such a beard as that?" cried a woman; "it is unendurable."

"I didn't make it," said Waller, simply.

"Oho. This is the Toorkoman of Roum!" said the young horseman with the steel cap, in whom Waller now recognised Zohrab Zubberdust; "he has escaped from old Nouradeen Lal; well—he shall not escape from me. These Feringhees are excellent grooms, and I want one. Bismillah! it is written—let us go—I shall protect you."

Like many a Christian, Zubberdust the Mussulman had the spirit of avarice and treachery in his heart; but as an Afghan mountaineer it was tempered with something of honour; for, strange to say, honour may exist among Mohammedans, as well as among Christians, without an atom of morality.

So Waller found himself marched off in a direction precisely opposite to that which he had been pursuing; and he had the additional tantalisation of seeing, about six miles distant, the picturesque Bala Hissar, or citadel of Jellalabad, which he could recognise from an engraving he had once seen; and ere midday he was conveyed by Zubberdust and his people to one of the numerous little castles or fortlets called *kotes*, that stud all the country in the neighbourhood of the city, which has always been the winter residence of the kings of Cabul; and there he was set at once to groom the horses, with a distinct notice that if he attempted to quit the fort, which was a square edifice furnished with a round loopholed tower at each angle, and surrounded by a wet ditch, wherein innumerable pink and white water lilies floated, he would be shot without mercy.

Before the gate were two brass six-pounder guns, taken from Elphinstone's unfortunate army.

Waller acquiesced with a groan in his breast. Well, thought he, working as a groom and rubbing down Zubberdust's beautiful horse, which had come from the land of the Usbec Tartars, was more congenial than ploughing; and hope suggested that the very animal he tended might gain him liberty; but his new master seemed to be merely a visitor at the fort, which belonged to an old Hazir Bashi of the King's Guards, and after remaining

there for ten days, he departed to rejoin Amen Oollah Khan. Prior to doing so, with great liberality he presented Waller, as an excellent groom, to a wealthy grazier of camels, named Jubār Khan, who was passing that way with several of these solemn-looking quadrupeds and some yaboos or Cabul ponies, which he meant to dispose of in Bhokara.

Seeing that Waller appeared crushed by the prospect before him, Zohrab said, ere he went—

“ Think yourself happy, for if Ackbar Khan were to get you, he might do as he has done to others, chain you to a stone in a vault, dark and cheerless as the tomb of a miser. Dogs!” he added, true to his overbearing nature; “ you came hither thinking to make us crumb-eaters of Shah Sujah! Bah! the cup of the covetous, saith the proverb, is filled with the dust of the grave. And where lie the covetous now? in the passes of Khoord Cabul!”

With something of despair gathering in his heart, Waller set forth in company with the grazier and others whom the latter employed as *syces*, and who were all well armed.

To dissemble he felt was his best plan, and he affected such perfect cheerfulness, made himself so useful in tending, watering, and grooming the camels and ponies, that he quickly won the entire goodwill and confidence of Jubār Khan, so much so that, after journeying for three days towards the hills of Hindoo Kush, on a valuable camel falling quite lame, he actually left Waller in care of it, at a species of camp formed by some Afghan shepherds and their families, whose tents of coarse black camlet were pitched in a sheltered spot by the bank of a beautiful stream.

Jubār Khan passed on his way, desiring Waller, in whose skill he trusted much, to rejoin him with the camel on a certain day at a khan or caravanserai among the mountains,—one of those one-storeyed, quadrangular edifices, full of bare rooms, built by the wayside for the accommodation of travellers, and the erection of which is considered one of the most meritorious acts that a Hindoo or Mussulman can perform.

Waller gladly saw the dark figures of Jubār Khan, his people and property, vanish into a pass of the mountains, where they seemed to go right into the setting sun, which shed through it a blaze of crimson light; and then he set himself zealously to tend the ailing camel, in the hope that when well he should depart threewith on a journey of his own. In three days the camel was quite restored; but on the morning of the fourth, when Waller went as usual to groom it, the animal was gone!

It had been stolen in the night, by whom, all pretended ignorance; and Waller, who immediately affected great anxiety to

rejoin his master the grazier, was told that he must remain where he was, "as a hostage for the missing camel, and that as so excellent a groom could not be an indifferent shepherd, he would be useful in tending the sheep."

A crook was put in his hand, a brass lotah for drinking, a few chupatties for food were given him, and he was set to watch a flock of dhoombas, or those Persian sheep that have tails nearly a foot broad, are almost entirely composed of fat, and form the most valuable stock of those nomadic dwellers in tents among whom he now found himself. By the poor agriculturists he was however treated with great kindness.

Farther than ever from Jellalabad now, without money, arms, or a horse, his clothes in rags, his boots almost worn away, Bob Waller sat like one in a stupor by the side of a rivulet that trickled through the pasture where the sheep were grazing ; and as he looked from the green mountains to the black tents that dotted their slope, he asked of himself, whether his present existence or his past was the dream.

"So here have fate and the fortune of war cast me ! a Turk, a ploughman, a groom, a shepherd," he sighed ; "by Jove ! what the deuce shall I be next ? The ancient sceptics doubted the reality of everything—and I begin to think they were right."

All was still, save when a stork or crow alighted on the granite rocks that overhung the mountain rivulet, or a fleet antelope shot like a spirit across the valley ; and so would pass the weary day, Bob Waller not watching the sheep, but the mountain shadows, changing from the eastward to the westward, while he sighed for a glass of Madeira and a biscuit, a glass of pale ale and a "quiet weed," and thought of the old time of tiffin in the jolly mess-bungalow, and the faces of those he should never see there again.

At night, crouching on a piece of xummal (or coarse blanket) and covered with sheepskins, Waller would dream at times of Mabel's bright face and merry laugh ; but more often, perhaps, of those terrible seven days and seven nights of the retreat through the snowy passes, where the living trod sullenly, doggedly, on over the dead, till they too fell, to be trod on in turn. Horrid phantoms haunted him. Had he outlived, out-trodden all ? Alas, it almost seemed so. Shots would seem to ring in his drowsy ear, and he fancied it was the Afghan juzailchees again ; anon he would think himself at home in pleasant Cornwall ; that he was after the brown pheasants within sight of the sounding sea, or among the quails on wild and rugged Lundy Isle ; and then he would start to wakefulness and lie for hours, revolving in his mind the means, the chances of reaching Jellalabad ; but, alas ! so much time had elapsed, that he might only

reach it to find that the garrison had abandoned it to save the hostages from death, or that the city was besieged by the victorious Afghans !

But now he was to have a proof of how often chance was better than the deepest laid design.

Joharah, the wife of the shepherd with whom Jubar Khan had left him, and whose name when translated signifies "a jewel," was a woman of singular kindness of heart, sweetness of disposition, and not without moderate pretensions to beauty. She was unusually kind to Waller, and did all in her power to alleviate the wretched condition to which fate had reduced him. Her husband was wont to boast that "she knew the language of the birds," and hence that they would inform *her* if Waller attempted to escape, for to understand the language of the feathered tribe was peculiarly one of the boasted sciences of the Arabians. The art is frequently referred to in the " Thousand and One Nights," and tradition records that Balkis, Queen of Sheba, had a lapping which conveyed all her messages verbally to King Solomon. Waller could have smiled on being told all this ; and he wished in his soul he had no other informants to dread than the birds that twittered about the valley.

Joharah, the Afghan woman, had remarked the growing depression that seemed to prey upon the spirit of Waller, and she was not without some interest in him, for the fairness of the European complexion contrasted in her eye pleasantly and favourably with the extreme darkness of the people around her. She had more than once detected him with a lock of Mabel Trecarrel's bright brown hair in his fingers, and with a woman's acuteness she speedily divined that thereby hung "a tale." One day she surprised him thus occupied when he was seated moodily and alone under a pistachio tree that grew near where their tents were pitched. Approaching softly, she laid a hand timidly on his shoulder, and after glancing hastily about to see if they were observed, she bent her dark bright eyes on his, and said—

" I dreamt of you last night."

" Of me ?"

" Yes ; even by the side of my husband," she added, with a smile, that was not without a dash of coquetry in it.

" Indeed !" replied Waller, perplexed, and fearing that if this was the prelude to a flirtation, his troubles would be thereby seriously increased.

" I saw you clad in *green*, our holy colour, and accept that as a sign that I must befriend you, and send you to her you love."

" I thank you ; 'to her I love,'" repeated Waller tremulously, while a flush suffused his cheek.

" You are very sad and gentle," said Joharah.

"The thoughts of *her* make me so," said Waller.

"Ah! the perfume of her presence is about you still," said the Afghan woman in her figurative language; "she has been unto you what the rose was to the piece of clay in the little story of Sâdee."

"I do not understand you."

"'One day,' says Sâdee, 'when I was in the bath, a friend of mine put into my hand a piece of sweetly scented clay. I took it between my fingers, and said,

"Art thou musk or ambergris, for thy perfume charms me?"

"'I was but a humble piece of clay,' it replied; 'but I was some time in the society of a rose; the sweet quality of my companion was communicated to me, otherwise I should be only a bit of clay, as I appear to be.' So has it been with you."

"Perhaps so," replied Waller, smiling at this strange anecdote.

"It is Jellalabad you would reach?"

"Yes; how far are we from it?"

"Fifty cosses."

"A hundred of our miles!" thought Waller, and his spirit sank.

"Undisguised, you can never escape my husband's people, or hope to reach it safely; but I shall provide for all that."

"You will not deceive me?" said Waller anxiously, as he feared some snare.

"No, I swear it; be of good courage and you shall soon be safe."

The following day, when most of the shepherds had gone to prayer at a musjid among the mountains, leaving the women and female children behind, as the sexes never pray together in the mosques, she conducted Waller into the inner portion of their tent—her own apartment—where discovery would have ensured him instant death. With scissors she clipped off closely his long fair beard and moustaches; she stained his face, ears, and neck with walnut juice and wood ashes; his hair she disguised by smearing it with more ashes and *ghee*—a process under which Waller, usually so dainty in his toilet, rather winced. She took away and buried his poshteen and tattered uniform, and made him, in its place, put on the red dress of a Hindoo Fakir. She slung a brass drinking lotah to his girdle of cord, gave him some chupatties and other food, and, placing a staff in his hand, showed him the route to pursue, a narrow path among the mountains, by which he could avoid a rencontre with the returning shepherds, and strike on the direct road for Jellalabad.

Waller's heart was filled with genuine gratitude; but he had only his earnest thanks to bestow on this good woman, who

hastened his departure ; and in less than two hours after she had thus transformed him, he had left the black tents of the shepherds several miles behind him.

In no other disguise than this could he have been so safe from discovery. In the character of a Fakir he might beg with impunity, revile and anathematise with a vociferation that inspired terror, or he might remain obstinately silent, according to the pretended humour or real emergency of the moment. Thus, as none might dare to question his motives, his supposed sacred calling rendered him safe alike from interruption, injury, or suspicion, and he went on his way rejoicing.

He had many strange and quaint adventures, but encountered no more perils by the way he had to pursue on foot. His great stature and sturdy figure won him the special favour of the women, particularly of those with whom he conversed at the wayside wells ; and in many instances he discovered that pleasant little perquisites must often fall to the share of Fakirs and Dervishes ; for ladies contended for the honour of feeding him, and pressed upon him tillas, and even mohurs of gold, to have refused which would have been totally untrue to his clerical character. Once he had a narrow escape from encountering Osman Abdallah the Arab Hadji, the same fanatic whom he had run through the body on the day the Envoy was assassinated, and whom he saw asleep, too probably intoxicated with bhang, on a piece of mat, at the door of a village khan. On another occasion he had to endure for several miles the society of a rival Fakir—a Pandarom enthusiast, who wore an iron garden gate, of considerable weight and size, rivetted round his neck as a penance, which excited the charity and fear of all who beheld him ; but on the fortieth day after the retreat from Cabul began, Waller, to his joy, saw once more before him the vast and fertile plain of Jellalabad, the stately city with all its white walls and round towers, and its green background of magnificent mountains, many of them being wooded to the summit ; but, to his eye, the most pleasing features in the scene were the scarlet coats of the sentinels on the ramparts of the Bala Hissar, on which the union-jack was waving in the morning wind.

Waller was, perhaps, not much given to prayer, but his emotions of gratitude to Heaven were great and keen when at last he found himself passing between the Piper's Hill and the old Mosque that stands south of the city, round the walls of which he had to proceed between the Shah's garden and the great citadel to reach the Peshawur Gate, where a guard of Her Majesty's 13th Light Infantry (Prince Albert's own) was posted ; and the astonishment of the soldiers, when they heard themselves accosted in pure English by a Hindoo Fakir, was intense ;

but the officer in command, Lieutenant Sinclair—the same ingenuous fellow who had built the pleasure boat during the previous and happier winter at Cabul—now came hastily forward.

"Waller—Bob Waller, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed, recognising an old friend in spite of his filthy disguise; "so you, too, have escaped, after all?"

"Yes, I—but poor Jack Polwhele, Devereaux, Burgoyne, and all the rest, have perished—all—all!" replied Waller, with deep emotion, as the men of the 13th crowded about him. "The bravest and the best are always cut off first; but, save me, all who came through the Khyber passes have gone to God."

"Trevelyan of yours, and Dr. Brydone, of the Shah's army, are safe with us; so *three* have escaped that terrible carnage."

"And what of the hostages?"

The face of Sinclair—a Scot from the banks of the Thurso, and, like all his surname, tall, grey-eyed, and fair-haired—grew dark as he replied,

"Elphinstone, the general, is dead—he expired in the hands of the enemy, who insulted his body, and beat the head with stones. The tribes are all in arms now—a regular 'gathering of the clans,' we should call it in Scotland. Ackbar Khan has fulfilled his threat, we are told, by sending the ladies for sale to the chiefs in Toorkistan; but nothing is certain save that, by a combined movement on Cabul, we are about to take a terrible vengeance."

Waller groaned, and ground his teeth in silence, for he was too much of an Englishman to make a scene, or give vent to the emotions that maddened him as he thought of Mabel, of her helpless companions, and the awful mystery that overhung the fate of Rose.

The hostages, to the number of eighty-eight officers and soldiers, with thirty-three females (three being wives of soldiers) and children, were at the mercy of barbarians, and what might have happened to them by that period? How many of them, husband and wife, parent and child, must have caressed and embraced each other despairingly from time to time, with only one idea in their minds,—that the lips they touched, the eyes they looked into with tenderness and love, the form they held, that was warm and living, might all belong to a dead and mangled corpse ere the dawn opened or the night closed!

CHAPTER L.

DENZIL A NAWAB.

WHEN consciousness came back to Denzil he found himself alone—alone with the dead. He knew not what time had elapsed since he had been struck down by the treacherous wretch whose life he had sought to save ; and no vestige of the retreating troops remained, save those whose bodies dotted all the wintry waste. Angrily and sadly the rising wind howled from the mountain pass, blowing before it over the frozen snow the long leaves of the *coss*, or dead grass, the fir cones and pistachio nuts from the thickets close by ; and some of these cones, that fall from the jelgoozeh, or mountain pine, are larger than artichokes. The dark and tortuous pass had apparently swallowed all his comrades ; yet through it now his way must lie, and, staggering up, he strove to follow the blood-stained track ; but the landscape, the mountains, the abandoned cannon, dead horses, camels, and bodies of soldiers, of the Hindoo dhooley-wallahs, and of many women, seemed all to whirl round him, and he nearly fell on the snow once more. Benumbed as he was, stiff and cold in every limb, with a dull crushing sense of pain in the back region of his head, from which the blood, now crusted and frozen, had flowed freely, he felt that he could only remain there and wait for death or succour, the former too surely, for already the gloom of evening seemed to be setting over the mountains, and he looked about him wildly and despairingly.

He had been in love, and had lost hope ; but he was in love yet, and had lost his mistress, which was sadder still, and was now likely to lose his life.

The bodies of several men of his company lay near, all mostly in attitudes expressive of the agony in which they had expired, with their wan and ghastly faces turned to the winter sky ; but the body of General Trecarrel was gone ; at least, he could nowhere see it. Had Polwhele and Sergeant Treherne succeeded in removing it ? If so, why was he left to his wretched fate ? Or had a wolf—but that idea was two repugnant, and he shrank from it.

An European woman, young and pretty, in her night-dress (as many ladies were who left the cantonments in litters), lay half in and half out of a dhooley, from the bed within which she had apparently been escaping when overtaken, and the snow was falling alike on her white bare breast and the pale face of the little babe she had been in the act of nourishing when the bullet of some relentless Ghilzie had slain her ; so her child

must have soon followed. It was a piteous sight ; and let those who have seen death amid all the hushed solemnity of a sick chamber in a land of peace imagine such a scene as this, and death under auspices so horrible and revolting.

Though sick and feeble, Denzil contrived to draw the dhooley a little way from the body of its late occupant, and crept within it for warmth. Prior to doing so, on seeing near him the Queen's colour of the 44th, or East Essex Regiment, lying in the hands of a dead ensign, he tore it from the staff and wrapped it over his poshteen, as an additional garment, and with a soldier's natural desire to save so important a trophy from the enemy. To this trifling circumstance, as it eventually proved, he owed his life ; and there he lay in a species of stupor, neither quite asleep nor quite awake.

Ere long the hungry vultures began to alight upon the bodies in the snow, and one, after flapping its dusky wings on the roof of the dhooley, actually perched upon his breast ; but on receiving a blow from his hand, it fled with an angry croak. Denzil was now thoroughly aroused, and his action would seem to have been observed, for twelve Afghan horsemen who had been scouting near, each with a juzailchee riding *en croupe* behind him, came cantering up, accompanied by, or rather escorting, Shireen Khan of the Kussilbashes, who was mounted, as usual, on a great solemn-looking camel, and armed, among many other weapons, with a formidable lance.

Seeing that Denzil was alive, one of the Kussilbashes (a pale-faced and black-bearded fellow, who wore a prodigious red cap, and had dangling at his neck the watch presented to General Trecarrel by Sir John Keane, after Ghuzni) made a thrust with his lance that must have killed him on the spot had not the Khan interposed, and commanded all to spare his life. Instinctively Denzil had drawn his sword, but Shireen said, with a grim smile,

"Sheath your weapon, Kaffir ; I, too, wear a sword, but I am an old man now, old by more than thrice your years, and I have learned to know that the sword is but the sickle of death—it destroys much and reaps little."

Denzil thought this moral reflection came somewhat late, but the Khan added—

"Your life shall be spared—*pesh*" (*i.e.*, forward) ; and stroked his beard, which is the silent form of an oath with the Afghans.

The singularity of his costume, the regimental colour of bright yellow silk with its massive gold embroidery, amid which the sphynx was conspicuous, with the mottoes, "Badajoz, Salamanca, Bladensburg, Waterloo," and so forth, appeared so remarkable, that the old Kussilbash chief conceived, in his simplicity, that he had captured at least a great Nawab or Bahadur of Feringhistan.

whose ransom or value as a hostage could not fail to be of importance. Hence, resolving to say nothing of his prize to Mohammed Ackbar Khan, of whose power he had already become jealous, Shireen ordered four juzailchees to alight, sling their rifles, and carry the dhooley with its inmate to the rear, naming some place to which the prisoner was to be conveyed, and they obeyed, but grumbling under their beards that they were only "carrying that which ought to be killed." Moreover, they were not without serious fears that, instead of being a Nawab or lord, Denzil might be a sorcerer, for these sphynxes and gold letters looked necromantic in their sight, and he might possess the power by a word to turn his bearers into yaboos or four black stones.

He remained perfectly passive and, perhaps, indifferent in their hands. His wound had bled profusely, and he was now in that state of extreme prostration which usually succeeds a great loss of blood, when the senses wander, and wild dreams, tangled and incoherent visions, disturb the brain of the sufferer. He felt very heedless of life; but there are times when death seems to avoid those who are so, and who fear him not. In all the misery of his condition he had but one consolation—that Sybil knew nothing of it. As his bearers trod on, he heard them, when occasionally they stumbled against a dead body, burst out into anathemas against the Feringhees, whom they stigmatised as "dogs, devils, sons of Shytan, sons of burnt fathers, and base-born Kaffirs," all of which gave him little hope for his ultimate safety.

The dusk of the January eve was closing in, when, after passing for some miles through a sheltered and well-wooded valley, the sides of which were studded by several castles or bourges, the strongholds of Nawabs and Khans of military tribes, the dhooley-bearers arrived at the arched gateway of the great country residence of the chief of the Kussilbashes.

It was, as usual with the Afghans, whose state of society is pretty much what it was among the Scots in the feudal days, a square fort, measuring about a hundred yards each way, with solid walls twenty-five feet in height, and flanked at each corner by a strong half-circular bastion. A fausse-bray and deep ditch surrounded it, the latter being filled by a canal cut from the Cabul river.

The zunah-khanch, or private dwelling of Shireen and his family, occupied the centre of the great square, and was surrounded by an inner wall or barbican, all loopholed for musketry, while traverses, mounted with cannon, guarded the entrances. The devan-kaneh, or hall of audience, through which Denzil was borne, was literally crammed with the plunder gleaned up from the retreating army—bullock trunks filled with wearing apparel,

barrack furniture, tents, arm-chests, musical instruments, and utensils of all kinds. It was decorated with much of barbaric splendour, and had its wall on one side composed of carved and gilded wood, wherein were six great panels inscribed with passages from the Koran, amid green and gold arabesques. These opened into apartments beyond, and could be slid up and down at pleasure (like windows in Britain) for the free circulation of air in summer.

Into one of these apartments Denzil was borne, placed on a couch made up chiefly from the bedding that was in the dhooley, and then a hakim came to examine his wound.

Amid all his deep grief and mortification for past events, he felt himself thankful for a cup of golden-coloured mellow Derehnur wine, which the hakim gave to restore his wasted strength ; "for it is the law of human nature that the claims of the living must become a counterpoise to the memory of the dead."

As loss of blood was the chief ailment of Denzil, on his wound being dressed he recovered rapidly, and in three days was able to sit on a kind of divan—for chairs were unknown in that part of the world—at a window, which overlooked a garden and the long wooded valley, at the extreme end of which, and in the dim distance, rose a high, green, conical hill which he recognised, and knew to look down on the plain and city of Cabul. His hakim was experienced enough in the art of dressing bullet holes and sword cuts, but his ideas of physic, beyond a charm written on paper, and washed into a draught, were somewhat perplexing and peculiar ; thus he prescribed and proffered various kinds of pills, powders, and potions, from the medicine chests of Doctor Brydone and other medical officers, in the belief that if one thing failed to insure perfect recovery, another might do so.

Denzil knew that he had been spared in the belief that he was a Nawab, and he feared to undeceive his captors as to that circumstance, lest they might kill him after all ; while he feared also that, if he left them in error, they might detain him for years, or seek to extort some enormous ransom. He knew nothing of the total destruction of the army, or of the existence and retention of other European hostages for the evacuation of Jellalabad. Thus he resolved, as he had no resort but patience, to await the pleasure of Shireen Khan, who was still absent, and hoped that he might find a more powerful and less avaricious protector in the person of the Shah, of whom our Queen was the friend and ally. Moreover, through his wuzer Taj Mohammed, some light might yet be thrown upon the fate of the lost Rose Trecarrel.

The Kussilbashes, in whose hands he was a prisoner, are a powerful military tribe, who formed exclusively the Royal Guard of Dost Mohammed, and can always with ease muster five thou-

sand fighting men. Distinguished by their scarlet caps, they are of Persian descent, and form a peculiarly Persian party in Afghanistan, where, as being Shecahs, they remain apart from the other Afghan people (who are bigoted Soonees), and are so exclusive that they have their own quarter of Cabul fortified against all the rest. Hence, though their chief was outwardly, and, when it suited his own interest, actually an adherent of Ackbar Khan, he had been secretly and deeply implicated in political intrigues with the late Envoy, whose remains yet hung in the market-place.

From the hakim Denzil learned that one of our officers, named Colonel Palmer,* had been cruelly tortured in the city by having a rope tied round his bare leg, after which it was twisted tight by a tent-peg (like the old French boot); and this made him more than ever anxious to reach the presence of the Shah, who still held the Bala Hissar with a few adherents; the remnant of the native army we had organised for him under British officers, all of whom, of course, had left him now. From his strange medical attendant he learned also of the old General's surrender and subsequent death.

"Bosh!" added the hakim; "your General Elphinstone, sahib, blew his trumpets and beat his drums before Cabul, like a hen that cackles when she has laid an egg. It was with him, as it is too often with the hen—premature exultation; for as little may become of the egg as has become of his army—for the former, instead of being in time a crowing cock, may become sauce, pillau, or pudding!"

The snow passed rapidly away; the weather became pleasant and warm, and though Denzil saw nothing of the Khan, from his window he could see the ladies of his household in the garden below, where, as usual with the upper class of Afghans, they spent much of their time in chatting among the bowers, talking scandal and listening to the songs of an occasional wandering musician, who played the *saringa*, or native guitar. It was once, while sitting listlessly looking into this garden, that Denzil had his hopes of succour from the Shah crushed for ever.

No ladies appeared that day, but he perceived Shireen Khan, to whom another Kussilbash was speaking, gesticulating violently; and as they drew nearer his window, which was on the third, or upper storey of the zunah-khaneh, he could overhear their conversation.

The stranger, Zohrab Zubberdust, now a Hazirbash, in the Body Guard of Ackbar Khan, was a handsome but fierce-looking young man, with a high aquiline nose, heavy black moustache,

* Of the 27th Bengal Infantry.

and a face of almost European fairness. He had a tall plume in his scarlet cap, which was braided with gold ; but, as the hilt of his sword, and the right sleeve of his yellow camise of quilted silk, were thickly spotted with blood, it was evident that he had been concerned in some recent outrage. There was sternness on his brow, a sneering expression on his lips, and a wild glitter in his eyes, as he said in a mocking tone—

“ Khan, what mean you by this indignation ? Solomon had seven hundred wives, and old Shah Sujah, whom the Queen of Feringhistan sought to befriend, had one hundred more, because he deemed himself wiser than Solomon ; but, with all his wisdom, where is he now ?”

“ In Cabul.”

“ No ; on the road near Shah Shakeed, dead.”

“ Dead, say you ?”

“ Yes ; dead as that Solomon of whom I spoke—dead as a dog !” he added savagely.

“ What new horror is this ?” asked Shireen, starting back.

“ Bah,” replied the other, adding, in the true style of Afghan cant, “ there has been nothing new since God put the sun in the firmament, and touched the stars with his fingers to send them through the sky. Everything that is now has been before, and shall be again.”

“ Did not the Shah, according to agreement, leave the Bala Hissar to go to Jellalabad ?”

“ This morning he did so ; but it chanced that last night the son of Zamon Khan placed in ambush fifty of his juzailchees secretly among some wild tamarind trees, and when, about the hour of morning prayer, the king’s retinue reached the spot, a cry like that of a jackal was heard. It might have been a signal. I do not say it *was* ; but, oddly enough, the juzailchees rose as one man, and fired a volley. One ball pierced the Shah’s brain, and three his breast, while seven of his soldiers fell dead. Then we rushed on him, and took from his litter the crown, the royal girdle, his sword and dagger, his jewelled robe, and, as they could be of no use to him *now*, we rode off, and laid them at the feet of Ackbar Khan.”

“ May he who planned this deed be stung by a scorpion of Cashan !” exclaimed Shireen, with great emotion, as he wreathed both hands in his venerable beard ; “ in all these affairs I ever meant that the life of the Shah should be sacred !”

“ Whatever you meant, Khan,” replied the other, with a mocking smile, “ the King of kings ordained otherwise, and Azrael, the angel of death, must be obeyed.”

And, significantly touching the hilt of his sword, the speaker

made a low salaam, quitted the garden, and Denzil saw him no more. Shireen remained for some time sunk in thought.

"And this has been your morning's work, son of Zamón Khan, when I thought that you and your fifty juzailchees were on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Lamech, in the vale of Lughmannee!" he muttered, as he walked slowly away, referring to a white temple which covers what is alleged to be the grave of Noah's father, and is a favourite place of pilgrimage among the Afghans.

Denzil felt alike saddened and depressed on hearing of this unforeseen event; but to it, in some respects, he owed his future safety, and the circumstance that Shireen Khan retained him in his own hands, and did not deliver him to the terrible Ackbar, as, from the day of the unfortunate Shah's assassination, the Afghan chiefs were split into two factions—the Kussilbashes taking part with one, and the tribes of Cabul and the Kohistanees with another.



CHAPTER LI.

A MEETING.

DAY after day had gone past in utter monotony, till Denzil's heart began to ache in the great weariness of the life he led—it was so calm, and seemed so still after the fierce and keen excitement he had undergone. Had he entered upon a new state of existence? he asked of himself; if so, it was an intensely stupid one.

One evening, when seated, as usual, on the divan at his window, looking dreamily out upon the long vista of the green valley, and the conical hill that terminated it, dim and blue in distance, he was feeling the balmy breath of the spring breeze with pleasure, and with all an invalid's relish was watching the young buds expanding, and the first flowers of the season beginning to peep from the teeming soil, when the Nazir, or steward of the household, a tall man of venerable aspect, whose beard flowed to his girdle, and the middle of whose head was shaved, came with an invitation from the Khan to join him and his family at their evening meal.

Denzil bowed his acceptance, and in his sorely worn uniform made what toilette he hastily could, for a khan like the head of the Kussilbashes, who could bring into the field five thousand well-armed men, chiefly splendidly mounted cavalry, was assuredly a man of considerable note and power in the land, and his favour or protection were of some value in that far-away corner of the world.

In an apartment, the walls of which were prettily decorated by painted and gilded arabesques, with passages from the Koran around it, in lieu of a cornice, he found the Khan sitting on a musnud, or species of cushioned seat, that is usually reserved for persons of distinction. A lady was seated by his side, and both were so intent upon a game of chess that neither looked up when Denzil entered.

Seated on the floor, but on rich carpets, were the wife of the Khan, a woman of some forty years old, very sallow and *passée*, her long camise of green Cabul silk, ornamented with golden crescents sewn on ; her hair, as yet untinged with grey, arranged in countless plaits, her hands odiously reddened to the hue of coral, and her two daughters, passably pretty women, with their hair loose and their trousers white, in token of being unmarried, and all three wearing many chains of gold and strings of Venetian sequins.

Denzil bowed low, and paused irresolutely, waiting to be greeted by the Khan ; but that personage was bending over the board deeply intent on the game, his long white beard floating above the ivory chessmen, his bushy brows and wrinkled forehead full of thought, his brown and thick-veined hands contrasting strongly with the slender snow-white fingers of his opponent, whose hand was indeed a delicate and lovely one ; her face, however, was concealed by her position, and the mode in which she wore her veil ; and Denzil knew the peril of seeming too curious.

Like those of the other three ladies, her dress was of the finest Cabul silk, but of a rose colour, and covered her whole figure, as a night-robe would have done ; like the Khan's daughters, her trousers were also white, her slippers high-heeled and shod with iron. Crescents of silver were sewn over all her loose hanging sleeves, and the breast of her dress was literally a mass of them, so that it shone in the sunlight like a cuirass.

The wife of the Khan clapped her hands, the ordinary mode of summoning attendants in the East, as she wished the trays with refreshments introduced. This caused Shireen and his companion to look round, and an exclamation of profound astonishment, in which joy and something of deep anxiety mingled, echoed through the apartment, when Denzil and Rose—Rose Trecarrel—recognised each other !

On this, one of the Khan's daughters hastily assumed, but for a few minutes only, her *bourkha* or veil of white muslin, which had a space of open network for the eyes ; and the other whispered to her mother some indignant remark concerning “the effrontery of a Kaffir coming into their presence with his jorabs (*i.e.*, shoes) on.”

If it be true that “among a crowd of total strangers an

acquaintance ranks as a friend," how great must have been the emotions of the volatile Rose, on meeting her avowed lover among those odious and horrible Afghans !

"Rose!"

"Denzil!"

After all they had mutually undergone, the sound of their own names and their own language, had in them so much of *home* and the past, that both were deeply moved ; and heedless of those who were present, forgetting all about them, in fact, the impulsive girl flung herself into his arms, and he pressed her to his breast. So, to the undemonstrative Orientals, they formed a very unexpected tableau. She had undergone so much and her agitations were so complicated, that for some time she was quite incapable of speech and could only sob hysterically. She was very pale and worn, but he was so too.

"So you also are a prisoner—do you forgive me now, Denzil?" she asked in a low voice.

"Forgive you—oh Rose, I could die for you!" he responded, passionately.

How often in the visions of the night and in the reveries of the day—those trances of thought to which all at times abandon themselves—had Denzil pictured to himself Rose Trecarrel reclining in his arms, even as on that day by the lake, Rose so bright, so fair and beautiful, and now he held her in reality !

But though she had deceived him once and might do so again, no such fear occurred to him then, and forgotten too were all the bantering remarks of Polwhele and Burgoyne (now, alas, no more) which had excited so much pique, jealousy, and fury in his heart. She was, he knew, so lonely in the world, and she looked so lovely and so helpless. After a time, she said anxiously,

"There has been great slaughter, I have heard ; poor Papa, he has escaped, I am sure, and dear Mab and Waller are safe, and all the rest?"

"All cannot have escaped!" was Denzil's vague response ; "yet you have done so, and that is enough for me, darling."

She now poured upon him questions, some of which he dreaded to answer. When and where was he taken prisoner ? Whom of those she loved had he seen last ? Of her father, of Mabel and Waller, Denzil professed total ignorance. He only knew that the body of the poor General had disappeared, and of subsequent events he knew nothing save that many ladies and officers of rank were retained in Cabul, held there by Ackbar Khan, as hostages for the future evacuation of Jellalabad ; so hope and lightness of heart began to dawn on Rose, for neither she nor Denzil were aware of the exact state of matters, or of all the calamities that had befallen their friends.

"And Mabel—dear, dear, Mabel," she exclaimed in a touching voice, "how often do I dream of her, and fancy at times that I feel her cheek, wet with tears, against mine; for though but a little older than I, she has ever been as a mother to me, and these visions are passages of intense emotion, Denzil. Our mamma, who died so long ago, comes to me in my sleep, and poor papa, too, looking just as when I kissed him last, ere we went to rest, in that wretched tent in the snowy pass; so my heart is wrung with suffering, and I shed tears, Denzil—hot salt tears in my sleep—I, who used to be so merry and thoughtless."

The Khan and his family were, for the time, utterly forgotten; so was his game of chess, and he gazed alternately from the rooks, pawns, and castles, to the lovers, in great and grave bewilderment, for in the *empressement* of their meeting, there seemed something more than the mere joy of two friends, or natives of the same country recognising each other. Were they brother and sister, or husband and wife, or what?

"But how came you to be here—what happened?" asked Denzil.

Her story, with all its apparent mystery, was both short and simple. She had heard shots in the night, and was peeping from the door of the tent, while her weary companions slept. A crowd of Afghans were passing,—the Shah's 6th Regiment were deserting *en masse*. A *loonghee*, or turban-cloth, was cast over her face by one of them, who twisted it across her mouth in such a manner as to stifle her cries completely; a havildar, mounted on a stolen horse, dragged her up beside him, and thus she was borne off, unseen in the dark, as they evidently believed that a white woman would be deemed the most valuable species of loot by some wealthy Khan or Nawab. When day broke they found themselves among the Black Rocks, near Cabul, and then a vehement dispute ensued between the havildar and her first captor as to whom she should belong—whether they should keep, sell, or cast lots for her. Knives were promptly drawn; but some Kussilbash Horse came up and solved the difficulty by sabreing them both. They then carried her off to the fort of Shireen Khan, who had treated her with marked kindness and hospitality; and now she and Denzil turned towards him, and the latter expressed his extreme gratitude for all he had done for them both, adding that he hoped they would be mercifully permitted to rejoin their friends and people.

But Khan Shireen shook his head, and replied,

"*Sahib*, you know not what you ask, or how your friends are situated. Your army has been destroyed on its downward march to Jellalabad, and the hope of Ackbar is, that if the Sirdir Sale quits that city for Peshawur, the wild Khyberees and Ghilzies will soon annihilate his army too."

And such was indeed the hope of those in power at Cabul.

"Then our forces suffered severely, Khan?" said Denzil.

"So severely, that but *one* remained alive to tell the tale."

Denzil smiled at this, believing it to be mere Oriental hyperbole.

The entrance of servants with trays, on which were plums, peaches, and other fruit preserved in sugar, sweet chupatties, and a flask or two of yellow Derehnur wine (though forbidden by the Prophet), enabled Denzil to address some apologies to the ladies of the house, who invited him to seat himself on the edge of their carpet, an unwonted honour; and then the simple collation proceeded without the use of spoons or forks, which are alike unknown in that region.

Fresh southern-wood was thrown on the fire, and its fragrance filled all the apartment with a powerful perfume.

Rose felt herself constrained, but most unwillingly, to resume her part of chess-player, which she did in silence, as she scarcely knew a word of the Khan's language, but he had been delighted with her on first learning that she could play the knightly game, and play it well too, as chess is peculiarly an Oriental pastime, and was brought into Europe originally by the returned Crusaders.

"Shabash!" (Bravo) he exclaimed, and patted her kindly on the shoulder, as she again took her place near him; but her eyes ever wandered from the chess-board to the face of Denzil, whom the Kussilbash lady and her daughters overwhelmed with questions, many of which they had long since asked Rose. Among these were the three invariable queries, whether the East India Company was a man or a woman; if it was true that our ruler in Feringhistan was a Queen, and if the men in that region wore trousers, while the women did not. They conversed with him freely, and without constraint, for among the Afghans, unlike other races which profess the Moslem faith, intercourse between the sexes is somewhat on an European footing, and the home of the Afghan husband is one which deserves to be accounted such, as all his leisure hours are spent with his wife and children; and he leads his guest without fear or scruple into the family circle. Hence, with all their ferocity, the passion of love is neither unknown nor unhonoured among them.

Two or three days elapsed after their meeting before Denzil and Rose Trecarrel became aware that so many hostages were retained in the hands of Ackbar as pledges, to answer with their lives, or at least with their liberties, for the final withdrawal of all our troops from Afghanistan, including Sir Robert Sale's Brigade in Jellalabad and General Nott's division, 9000 strong, in Candahar; and now they found that, owing to a split in the enemy's camp, and a coolness between the Sirdir and the Khan Shirseen, the latter was detaining them *in secret* as hostages on his own account.

" Set me free ! " she had frequently implored of him.

" Not if you gave me all the lost riches of Khosroo," he replied, referring to the supposed buried treasure of Cyrus.

She had next besought aid of his wife, who shook her head, and said laughingly—

" Ere long, you will too probably be sold to a chief in Toorkistan, and live in a castle, or perhaps a tent, as his wife ; if he chooses to make you such before the Cadi," added the Kussilbash lady, gazing with her great black eyes into the clear hazel orbs of the shocked and perplexed English girl, and feeling herself the while as much embarrassed in their difference of ideas as if her guest had come from Jupiter, Saturn, or any other of those planets which to her were but as lamps set in the sky by God or the Prophet, she knew not which, as the moollahs were somewhat uncertain on the subject.

But now the great event of having the society of Denzil made Rose, who had previously felt herself so friendless and forlorn, so desolate and lost, much more hopeful and contented ; and something of her old coquetry came to the surface again, when daily he walked with her in the garden of the fort, as they were never permitted to go beyond its walls. They had both undergone much, and witnessed some frightful scenes ; but it was with them there, as with those who dwell " in the countries where earthquakes are frequent, and where in almost every century some terrible convulsion has laid a whole city in ruins—the inhabitants acquire a strange indifference to peril till the very instant of its presence, and learnt to forget calamities when once they have passed."



CHAPTER LII.

MARRIED OR NOT ?

UNDER the magic influence of Rose's presence, Denzil felt almost content for the time, and his heart swelled with mingled love and joy ; then obstacles would seem to give way, fears to fade, and he felt his heart endued with a new strength. The hope of rescue or the chances of escape together, formed a fertile and endless source of conversation and surmise for these two isolated beings ; but Rose had to humour the Khan by playing chess with him whenever he requested her to do so, while his wife and daughters quite as frequently compelled Denzil, who knew Hindostanee, to read for them an Oriental poem of

which they never seemed to grow weary. It was a handsome volume of exquisite Eastern penmanship ; all the pages were perfumed, and no two of them were alike, all the vignettes of birds, of gilded mosques, of black-bearded emirs and bayaderes, the elaborate borders and chapter heads being radiant in colours and gold. It described the petrifaction of the City of Ishmonie, a place alleged to be in Upper Egypt, where all that were once animated beings were by an enchanter changed in an instant to stone, and where they may still be seen, in all the various positions of sitting, or standing, eating, sleeping, or caressing each other—a legend which obviously arose from the circumstance of the vast number of statues of men, women, and children that are, or were, in the place ; but this poem so palled upon Denzil that he shivered with weariness whenever the subject was named to him.

And now as a certain assurance of safety came into the mind of Rose Trecarrel, she began to resume some of her old coquettish ways with him ; thus one day as they were promenading in the garden of the Khan's fort, where the early flowers of Spring were maturing under the genial shelter of the high embattled walls, when he familiarly addressed her as "Rose," she said, with an assumed pout on her ruddy lips,

"I must really forbid you to call me Rose—even here."

"I called you so once, unchecked—by the lake, on that day which you must remember," he urged gently.

"That day is past."

"But its memory remains. What then am I to call you ? To say 'Miss Rose,' or 'Miss Trecarrel,' after the events of that day would seem both strange and distant. You are always 'Rose' to me—in my heart, I mean."

"Fiddlestick ! do be sensible. Call me—well, you need not call me anything that may compromise either the past, the present, or the future."

"Oh, how unkind of you," said he, eyeing her with a somewhat dubious expression.

"Poor Denzil," she replied, looking down ; "I would to Heaven you were not so fond of me."

"Fond, is not the word, Rose—but why?"

"Because I was only flirting with you, as I have done with others," replied the laughing girl, with a cruelty that was perhaps unintentional, as she was indeed older than her years, for there are some women who in mind and body are more rapidly developed than others.

Denzil was only somewhat past twenty, and his love for her was fresh as the flowers that were springing up around them. It had been wasted on none yet, and Rose was the first who seemed

to fill up all the soft illusions of the mind, as being the only one he could love, and the touch of whose hand or arm would send a thrill of ecstacy to his heart.

Could hers really be so elastic? he now asked of himself; did one passion really efface another in her breast, even as the waves efface the footmarks on the sandy shore? Could she love more than one, and perhaps more than one at a time?

She sat on a garden seat with her handsome white hands folded before her. A jet cross which had escaped the pillagers was on her snow-white neck, when it rose and fell with the undulations of her breathing. Her long lashes and delicate lids were drooped over the clear brown eyes, that could be so waggish, droll or cold and calm, as fun, or passion, or prudence, swayed her. The whole *pose*, her aspect, the contour of her head, the exquisite turn of the white and stately throat, so like that of Mabel, were not lost on Denzil as he gazed, and in gazing, worshipped her.

"A penny for your thoughts, friend Denzil," said she looking up with a laughing face and breaking a silence of some minutes' duration.

"They are priceless, Rose, because they are of you."

"Well, like Paul, you may be most tender and full of truth—the latter a rare virtue in men; but I can never play the part of Virginia."

"Why?"

"Because I am too giddy, perhaps," replied Rose; yet with all her coquetry she was not without an emotion of genuine pride at the conviction of having inspired so handsome and earnest a young man with an attachment so devoted and pure.

But what was to be the sequel to all this?

As Artemus Ward says, "one is always inclined to give aid and comfort to the enemy, if he cumbs in the shape of a nice young gal;" and doubtless the old Khan of the Kussilbashes seemed to think so too; for to Rose he was unusually kind, and somewhat unwisely was wont at times to praise her to his wife. Once he said,

"The girl is beautiful as a bird of paradise."

"Yes; but quite as dumb and useless--there is nothing in her," replied the lady.

"She knows her own language, not ours. She has splendid eyes, at all events; they might get me six good horses among the Usbec Tartars."

"Yes, lovely eyes certainly; yet they seem out of place anywhere, save in a seraglio," was the sharp response of the Khanum, who evidently disapproved of the praise and the chess-playing; "send her to Ackbar Khan."

"Nay; that suits not my purpose, either for her or her friend," replied the Khan, on whose mind some remarks made from time to time by his wife were beginning to have an effect.

He had seen the open and free intercourse of the Feringhee sahibs, male and female, at the band-stand, at the race-course, in the Cantonments, in the gardens, and other places in and about Cabul, during the previous winter; he had also seen them together in Sinclair sahib's wonderful boat; but there was something in the footing of Rose and Denzil that sorely puzzled him. They were too familiar to be mere friends, and she was not tender enough apparently to be a lover; so, after closely observing them for some days, he came to the conclusion that they were married, and if not, that they ought to be.

Thus with the native suspicion of an Oriental, he began to think that they must be married, and concealed the fact from him for some reason or purpose of their own. He even spoke pretty pointedly on the subject to Denzil, and hinted that if she were his wife it might prevent her from being sold to the Toorkomans; but the circumstance of her being married to an infidel would not have made much difference to those sons of the desert.

Denzil was alarmed and knew not what to think of this new feature in their affairs. Rose would not have much fortune in England; Denzil had less, and to marry on his subaltern's pay and allowances, even in India, might prove ruinous to both; but here they were isolated from all in the outer world—in Afghanistan; in a land where steam and printing were unheard of; and where forks and spoons, clocks, and even toothbrushes were as much unknown as they were to Father Adam and Mother Eve.

Shireen Khan might solve all their difficulties by slicing off Denzil's head and selling Rose to the highest bidder in Toorkistan, if the whim to do either occurred. In his alarm Denzil admitted that they were affianced to each other, a state of matters beyond the comprehension of the old Kussilbash, as a Mussulman in choosing a wife usually relies on his mother, or a female friend who does this office for him.

"Did your mother select her for you?" asked the Khanum, who was present.

"No," replied Denzil.

"She treats you ill, I fear; a little beating would do her good," suggested the lady.

"A beating!" exclaimed Denzil, with astonishment.

"Yes," said Shireen, "among us men are allowed by the Koran to beat their wives, so long as they do not bruise the

skin ; for the Prophet has ordained that women shall not be treated as intellectual beings."

" Why?"

" Lest they aspire to equality with men."

Denzil translated all this to Rose, who had been listening and turning from one speaker's face to the other ; she burst into a saucy little laugh, and said,

" Tell them that their Prophet was a precious old ——"

What she was about to designate him of Mecca, we know not, for Denzil placed his hand on her lips. The sharp black eyes of the Khan detected something in this action. They sparkled, while his face grew red as his cap with sudden anger, and with hands clenched and uplifted, he exclaimed,

" Now by the seven heavens and the veil of unity, through which the Prophet passed in his vision, but this is too much ! You are either married or not ? Do you laugh at my beard, Kaffirs ? If she is your wife, I shall respect her, nor send her, as I intended, to Bhokara or Toorkistan for sale ; if she is *not*, then so much the worse for her !"

And, as he spoke, the softness of his Persian dialect turned, in his anger, hoarse and guttural as that of an Afghan.

" Your wife, Denzil ?" exclaimed Rose, blushing with mingled amazement and annoyance, when the first part of this speech was told her ; " I do care more for you than for any one else—but—but—"

" What dearest Rose ?"

" This is a little too much."

" Consider—the danger—the alternative."

" Must I pass myself off as such ?"

" It would appear so, dear Rose, for your own sake dissemble."

" Assume a virtue if I have it not !" said she, with some asperity.

" It is unavoidable, what are we to do ?"

" Why—is this a conspiracy between you, for it looks very like it ?"

" On my honour it is not," replied Denzil, earnestly and tenderly ; " but Toorkistan—think of that."

" Yes—Toorkistan !" repeated the Khan, detecting the word, resentment still gleaming in his eyes that a Kaffir girl should dare to laugh at or mock him.

And in this pleasant dilemma we must leave them for a time.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE WANDERER.

WE must now ask the reader to traverse with greater speed than even the electric wire possesses, both sea and land, and, annihilating time and space, accompany us once more to the opening scenes of our story—even to the grey, sea-beaten cliffs, and broad brown moors of Cornwall.

In an early chapter we referred to a certain hostelry named the Trevanion Tavern, as a place where sundry beverages were procurable, and to which General Trecarrel (whose poor old bones were whitening now with others in the Khyber Pass) sent Mike Treherne and his comrades on that exciting evening when Audley Trevelyan rescued Sybil Devereaux from the terrors of the gloomy Pixies' Hole.

It was the sweet season of spring, and the flowers of balmy April were in all their bloom ; the young and fragrant buds were bursting in the woods of Rhoscadzhel, and the willows that gave a name to the long narrow glen, forming the avenue to Port-hellick, were as green, as leafy, and as graceful in their droop as when Constance, dark-eyed and pale-faced, sat at the windows of the pretty white villa, watching for her husband, Richard, cantering his horse to the little portico, where Derrick Braddon awaited him ; Denzil going forth to whip the troutng stream, or Sybil sitting, sketch-book in hand, under a tree, to shade her from the sunshine.

The Trevanion Arms, over which creaked and swung a sign-board decorated with the arms of that old surname, a fesse between two chevrons, with three escallops (for old Jack, like every Cornishman, had a pedigree), is a picturesque little old-fashioned house, partly built of granite and partly of straw and mud beaten into a consistency that is pretty enduring. Four boulders that had lain for ages on the promontory where it stands, had been improvised as corner-stones by the first builders of the edifice, and then the erection proved easy enough. It is square, with a trellised porch, which is always a mass of flowers and leaves ; two windows are on each side of this, and five above, while there are other little quaint dormers that abut from the roof, which is conical, or pavilion-shaped, to write more correctly : and the edifice was then, from its foundation to its apex, chimneys included, literally a mass of clematis, dark green ivy, jasmine and sweet briar, so matted and interwoven as completely to conceal where the wall ended and the roof began ; and in the pairing, season the snug recesses of this leafy covering were all alive,

with teeming nests and twittering birds, whose gaping bills and glittering eyes peeped forth at times when a frocked waggoner or dusky-visaged miner drew up at the door for a pot of creamy ale, or a quart of sharp, foaming Devonshire cider.

Though April, the night on which we visit this place is bleak ; the rain is swooping in torrents on the drenched land, and tossing sea ; black clouds envelop all the Bristol Channel, the wild waves of which were rolling in snowy foam against the bluffs of Tintagel, along Trebarreth Strand, and all that iron shore from thence, perhaps, to Cape Cornwall, for it was just such a night of storm as the old Cornish wreckers would have loved, and hung their lanterns on the cliffs to mislead doomed ships at sea.

Seated alone, gazing intently into the sea-coal fire that burned low in the grate of the humble tavern parlour, smoking a short pipe, and taking occasional sips from a tankard of ale, was a somewhat tattered, but well-bearded, grizzled, and weather-beaten man, about sixty years of age. His features were rather Cornish or Celtic in type ; the nose and cheek-bones high, the eyes keen and glittering, when the firelight shone on them ; his sturdy figure and well-embrowned hands showed that his life had been one of hard work, and, by the peculiar mode in which he carried his head, it was easy to see that he had been drilled as a soldier in the ranks.

Intently thinking, he sighed deeply once or twice, and, looking round the room as a gust of the storm without roused him from reverie, he said aloud,—

“ So here you are at last, after all that has come and gone—here at last, and for what, Derrick Braddon ? ”

For Derrick Braddon he was—Derrick, the faithful attendant and follower of the late Richard Pencarrow Trevelyan—Lord Lamorna ! His fate and adventures had been strange ; for since the steamer *Admiral*, of Montreal, had perished at sea, Braddon had seen more of the world than he ever expected to behold again, and been so circumstanced, that he could never communicate with England, even in this age of ease and appliances ; or his letters had miscarried ; and now when he found himself once more at home—but, as it eventually proved, a home filled with strangers—his heart grew soft, and his eyes suffused, albeit that he was somewhat unused to the melting mood.

The purple moorlands, the great grey standing stones, the mines teeming with men and lights, and strange sounds, their giant works and grimy gearing ; the granite carks and the dark oak woodlands had all spoken of home and his boyhood to the returned wanderer, the faithful old soldier, and caused him to be

doubly sad ; nature was the same, but many a voice was hushed and many a familiar face was gone for ever.

The Trevanian tavern was unchanged even to the leafy tendrils that clambered over it, shrouding every inch of wall and roof, and hiding more than the half of each window ; but his old comrade, Jack Trevanian, whilom drum-major of the Cornish Light Infantry, who had left a leg in the Punjaub, and with whom he had smoked many a pipe, by that same hearth (where he now sat alone), talking of old times, and of the old regiment, where even their names were forgotten, was gone to his last home by Lanteglos church (the burial place of the Trecarrels, too), and another host occupied Jack's place in the bar-parlour.

Old Mike Treherne and Winny Braddon had quitted their native place, and gone to Plymouth, from whence Derrick had travelled thus far on a pilgrimage to Rhoscadzhel, when his heart began utterly to fail him.

From his sister Winny, the old nurse of Sybil, he had heard, with honest indignation, the details of that futile and remarkable visit paid to Rhoscadzhel, and how Downie Trevelyan had treated their now dead mistress. He was told, too, of her hapless lawsuit, marred, as it was believed, by the low practitioner, who, to gain some notoriety, had thrust himself unasked into the case. But he could only further learn "that Master Denzil was somewhere far away in the Ingies," and that Miss Sybil, the sweet-voiced and gentle-eyed Sybil, who had slept in her bosom in infancy, and whom she had seen develop into a lovely young woman, had, after seeking in vain to sell her drawings, gone penniless to London, after which she could hear of her no more.

"Gone to London?" repeated Braddon, with a groan ; "and penniless, too!"

He knew that amid the human tide of that mighty Babylon she might be lost as surely as if she were among the waves of the ocean ; and then, as the old soldier thought of his proud dead master, and how he had loved that little daughter, he sighed again bitterly.

From the breast-pocket of his well-worn pea-jacket (Derrick was attired somewhat like a sailor) he drew forth a rusted and battered tin case. It was thin and flat in form, and he surveyed it long and silently. Then he opened the lid, as if he was often in the habit of doing so, mechanically and as if to assure himself that the contents were safe ; and he was, perhaps, about to draw them forth for inspection, when a sound startled him, and he hastily consigned the case to its keeping-place, just as the landlord ushered in a man, who was dripping with rain, and

whose personal appearance, the soaking of his somewhat seedy habiliments had by no means improved.

Derrick courteously made way for the stranger, who ordered some "gin and water hot," and after desiring the landlord to let him know when the "first return fly," by which he meant a brougham, passed for some town that he named, he proceeded to drink Braddon's health, and to dry his shabby black garments by the rotary process of turning, as if in a roasting-jack before the fire, raising the limp tails of his coat from time to time over his long and awkward-looking arms and lean bony hands.

"A wet night, sir," said he.

"Yes; but I have seen a wetter," replied Braddon.

"The dooce you have!"

"Aye, at sea; on a night when I was precious near having a cold water cure for all my sufferings."

"How?"

"By being drowned."

"Your fate is perhaps a drier one. You are, I suppose, a sea-faring man?"

"I am an old soldier, and have served in the Cornish Light Infantry, as boy and man, for one-and-twenty years, and have earned my shilling a day from the Queen, God bless her! so don't crack your stale joke on me," said Derrick grimly and emphatically, as he surveyed the new-comer, whose face, somehow, seemed not unfamiliar to him.

He was attired in clothes a world too wide for him; the collar of his coat rested on the nape of his neck, and its sleeve cuffs fell well nigh over his fingers; the legs of his trousers flapped loosely over his broken boots, and the tall shiny hat which he had deposited on the deal table, after carefully wiping it with a coloured handkerchief, had evidently seen better days upon another and perhaps honester head. His brow was low and narrow; the frontal bones projecting over keen eyes of a non-descript colour, and a mean turned-up nose. Mistrust, acute-ness, suspicion and avarice, were the leading expressions of his face, which would have horrified a disciple of Lavater; yet, in the tone of his voice, and in his manner, there was an affectation of deferential suavity, as if he sought to win rather than to repel a confidence that few, unless very simple indeed, would accord to one with lips so thin and cruel, and whose ears, like those of a cat, were nearly on the line of his pericranium, which was covered by a few wisps of thin, grey, and dead-looking hair. Yet this ugly personage has been described to the reader before.

Perceiving that his jest had not been appreciated by the veter-an, he resumed the conversation in a different style.

"Know these parts?" said he, drinking his gin-and-water, and fixing his eyes furtively on Derrick.

"Think I should," was the curt response.

"Ah"—

There was a pause; then the other said,—

"Many hereabout will be surprised to hear of old Derrick Braddon coming to earth again."

The shabby stranger started, and the iris of his cunning eyes dilated and shrunk again in a somewhat feline fashion, as he asked eagerly,—

"What! were you the groom to Captain Devereaux who—well, occasionally—lived at Porthellick?"

"To the Right Honourable Lord Lamorna, if it is all the same to you," replied Derrick, stiffly.

"It is quite the same. What on earth is up! Is the sky about to rain larks, eh?"

"It is pouring a torrent anyhow, at this moment," was the dry response, as a fresh gust without dashed the leaves against the window-panes, and the cry of the red-legged Cornish chough, driven from his eyrie in the cliffs, was heard on the passing tempest.

"Where have you been all this time—nearly nine months, now?"

"That is too long a story to tell a stranger."

"And where is your master?"

"In his grave, God rest him!—in his grave, if the great sea can be called so."

"How long have you been in England?"

"Three weeks."

"And in Cornwall?"

"I have just arrived."

"Then you may not have heard of me, William Schotten Sharkley, solicitor, who acted as your mistress's agent in her case which failed for want of legal or documentary proofs. I did all that I could to befriend her..."

"And pocketed her last shilling, as I have heard."

"Law is an expensive amusement, and lawyers must be paid. I did my best."

"For that I thank you, Lawyer Sharkley," replied Braddon, taking in his hard honest hand the damp, unwholesome fingers of the solicitor, adding somewhat awkwardly, "if you have a bad name, perhaps you can't help it."

Mr. William S. Sharkley's face darkened, and his eyes dilated and shrunk, but he was too craven in spirit to manifest the least annoyance.

"And it was through the lack of certain papers," resumed

Braddon, "that my lady's case was lost, and her heart broken?"

"Yes; the doubtful letter she produced referred to a certificate of marriage and a will in favour of her and her two children; but these documents, if they ever existed, no doubt perished with the captain, your master."

"They did not, as they are here—*here*—in the pocket of my old coat, Master Sharkley; so it is of more value than it looks, for it contains a peerage and an estate," replied Braddon, with gleaming eyes, as he slapped his breast emphatically.

For a moment Sharkley sat silent and bewildered, for the energy and perfect confidence of the speaker could not fail to impress him. Then he said,—

"You of course mean to turn them to account, somehow?"

"When the right time comes."

"And to show them—"

"To the right man when *he* comes."

"And who, and where is he?"

"Young Denzil Trevelyan—Lord Lamorna—now in India, with the old Regiment. Could I but get there—there to the young master—" continued old Derrick with fervour; "but I might as well wish myself in the moon; for I am a poor friendless old fellow. One thing, Master Sharkley, I sha'n't trust the papers with *you*."

Sharkley was silent again; Braddon's mistrust of him was open and unconcealed, and he saw but one way of obtaining a sight of papers so important, and that was by exciting his indignation by a sneer.

"Ah—the lady at the villa was very much attached to your master—very handsome, and I doubt not—"

"What more?"

"Very expensive, as these kind of folks usually are."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Braddon, sternly.

"I mean what my words imply; she could not prove herself a wedded wife, so her case had not a leg to stand on; yet I was her friend and adviser."

"You think thus ill of her, and yet thrust yourself into her case."

"My dear sir, I am a lawyer, and lawyers must feed."

"Which is too often feeding what ought to be hung," replied Braddon, with all a soldier's contempt for the other's cloth.

"I repeat that I was her friend," urged Sharkley.

"God keep us from such friends, if all I have been told is true."

"But giving a mere sight of those papers can do you no harm."

"And you small good; however, see them you shall," replied

Braddon, with something of grim triumph, as he drew them from the before-mentioned tin case.



CHAPTER LIV.

THE LOST STEAMER.

THE first document which Derrick produced and spread upon the table was the Père Latour's certificate of the marriage ; the second was an undoubted will, duly stamped and signed, wherein the testator, Richard Pencarrow Trevelyan, Lord Lamorna, of Roscadzhel, in the Duchy of Cornwall, left all he possessed to Constance Devereaux, his wife, for the term of her life, and after her death to their two children absolutely.

The cunning and avaricious eyes of Sharkley seemed to devour the documents, and his trembling fingers indicated the eagerness of his heart to possess them, as he saw that beyond all uncertainty they were genuine, authentic, and of vast legal value to the son and daughter of his late unhappy client ; nor were they of less worth to their opponent, if their existence could be terminated, *ere it was known*. Here was a means of triumph over the Messrs. Gorbelly and Culverhole—the solicitors of Downie Trevelyan, the present titular lord—who, as more respectable practitioners than Sharkley, had ever treated him with undisguised contempt.

Frequently his long lean fingers approached the papers, which were faded and yellow in aspect, having been stained by salt-water in the shipwreck ; but Derrick Braddon, aware of the man he had to deal with, had taken from his pocket a large clasp knife, with which he usually cut his tobacco, and which had been of much and varied service to him in his recent wanderings ; and with the point of this suggestive instrument he indicated the dates and so forth, while its production seemed to hint that any attempt to appropriate either the certificate or the will might be attended by an unpleasant sequel ; for old as he was, Braddon would have given a stronger antagonist than the village lawyer “a Cornish hug,” that might have been little to his taste.

When Sharkley had perused the papers which he was not permitted to touch, Braddon deliberately replaced them in their case, and carefully stowed the latter in his inner pocket, the cat-like eyes of the attorney watching all his motions, while a kind of sigh seemed to escape him. He drained his gin and water to the last drop and then said,—

"No doubt, Mr. Braddon, these papers are of great value ; but what do you mean to do with them?"

"Keep them for young Denzil. Once they are safe in his hands, he'll march in and take possession with colours flying."

Sharkley smiled at the old soldier's idea of the mode of succeeding to a title and heritage ; but, as the storm had not yet passed away, and no "return fly" had yet been announced, he resolved to improve the occasion, by worming himself into Derrick's confidence, and drawing all the information from him that he could win.

"But if your master was drowned, as you say he was, how came these important documents into your possession?"

"Drowned as *I say* he was ! Do you doubt me?"

"Nay, nay ; you misunderstand."

"Well, you shall hear all about it. Have another drain of gin and I shall have one more pot of ale ; I have not tasted such good old English tipple for many a day."

Then, after a little pause, Derrick began his narrative, which we shall give in our own words rather than his. The accounts of the wreck which Constance had read in the public prints, were scarcely a correct version of the catastrophe in all its details.

The ocean steamer *Admiral* had not been more than four days' sail from the mouth of the River St. Lawrence, when her engines broke down ; thus she was forced to continue the voyage under canvas, and being but ill calculated for sailing purposes, while endeavouring to beat against a continual head wind, she was driven so far south out of her direct course, as to be somewhere within seventy miles of Corvo, the most northern isle of the Azores, when she should have been breasting the waves of the British Channel.

When she had been three weeks at sea, the wind one night became a gale, and from a gale it freshened to a regular tempest ; and most of her crew, not being seamen, but such as are usually bred in coasting steamers, handled her extremely ill. Much of her canvas was split, rent to ribbons, or blown out of the bolt ropes ; and thus, by the time three bells in the middle watch were struck, the wind was howling through her bare rigging, for there was nothing left upon her save a staysail and trysail, by the aid of which four men at the wheel strove to steer her under direction of the quarter-master.

Apprehending no danger, Richard Trevelyan was quietly seated in the cabin, endeavouring to write up his diary, by the light of a single lamp, which swung madly to and fro from a beam overhead ; his desk was open, but was secured to the table, for every loose thing in the cabin was flying from port to

starboard and back again, as the vessel lurched and rolled. Derrick was standing, rather swaying to and fro behind his master's chair, as they conferred together concerning the exact date of some incident which he wished to record, and while conversing they heard a crash on deck, as the staysail sheet snapped in the fierce gust; and as the ship broached to, that is, was taken aback on the weather side, the seas flew in wild foam, and in fierce succession over her, from stem to stern. Then was heard the voice of the mate in charge of the watch, shouting to, "haul down the staysail, and bend on the sheet anew."

Ere this could be done, a wave some twenty feet in height took the crippled steamer right on her broadside, and tore away the boats, the entire bulwark, four signal guns, and half the crew, washing by a mighty volume of water, and at one fell sweep, all and everything overboard into the black and seething sea!

With an astounding crash, the funnel and mizenmast went next by the board; but the lower portion of the mainmast remained, with all its top-hamper hanging about it. The last lamp in the cabin went out; but not before Richard Trevelyan, who never lost his presence of mind, had secured the two documents in question, placed them in an inner breast-pocket of his coat, and calling on Derrick to follow him, went on deck, where a terrible and unexpected scene presented itself, in the aspect of the ship, changed now to a total wreck.

They had barely staggered along the slippery main-deck, so far as where the stump of the mainmast yet held on, when another wave, its mighty head cresting and curling with foam, that seemed all the whiter amid the blackness of the night, burst over the doomed ship.

"Hold on, my lord," cried Derrick, "for the love of Heaven, hold on!"

"Yes—and for the love of my poor wife," added Richard, as they simultaneously grasped some of the belaying pins at the base of the mast, and as soon as the mountain of bitter water passed away to leeward leaving them drenched and half-blinded, a more fearful sight was visible by the pale light of the stars.

The entire poop, from which they had just issued, had been torn away from the ship; the wheel, with its four men, the skylights, the upper deck, and all that was in the cabin below, were gone, and all was ruin, and all was silence. There save the seething of the angry sea. Some twenty of the passengers and crew were still clustered on the forecastle, seeking shelter between the bunks and windlass; but water was pouring fast into the ship, and as a portion of her deck was beginning to break up, Richard, who was powerful and brave as most men, grasped his faithful servant by the arm, and was assisting him towards

this temporary and comfortless bourne, when some of the planking parted below him, and he was suddenly enclosed nearly to the waist, in the jarring woodwork. Then a double shriek escaped him, for both his thighs were broken, and he was so peculiarly jammed among the wreckage, that at that particular time no human power could either aid or save him.

Derrick could only remain near him, helpless, bewildered, and uttering exclamations of commiseration, which mingled with Richard's groans, the hiss of the sea, the roaring of the wind, and the piteous ejaculations of the passengers.

"Oh, Derrick, what a wretched thing I am now," said he, through his clenched teeth, "and what a proud, hale man I was some five minutes ago ! Well, well, a six pound shot might have done as much for me elsewhere ; but Derrick, God and myself alone know the agony—the awful agony I am enduring. Would to Heaven it were all over—even though I shall never see *them* more—Constance—Constance, and the children !" he added, while nearly gnawing through his nether lip, in the intensity of his pain and despair.

He made more than one frantic effort to wrench his crushed limbs, and torn and bleeding flesh out of the sudden and terrible trap into which he had fallen ; but all such attempts were hopeless and futile, and he would pause exhausted and as pale as a corpse, with the perspiration wrung by agony, mingling with the spray on his temples. That he must soon be drowned, or die in an ecstasy of suffering was but too evident.

"I have often thought to die, Derrick," said he, in a husky voice, "and knew that the day and hour must come to all ; but I never thought to die thus. Blessed be God, that *she* knows nothing of it ! Do you hear me, Braddon, my old comrade ?"

And the servant wept as his master wrung his hand, and in weaker accents urged him to take possession of the two documents which were of such value to the family, and to preserve them even as he would his own life ; and with tears in his eyes—tears that mingled with the wind-swept foam—Derrick promised to do so ; and every minute Richard Trevelyan's once powerful and athletic frame grew weaker and weaker. Some of the arteries of his limbs had been torn as well as the ligaments, and he was evidently bleeding to death in his half crushed situation.

Amid their own sufferings and danger, his dying words and prayers were unheeded by the pale and drenched wretches who clung close by to the windlass and forecastle ring-bolts ; but terribly his sinking accents fell on the tympanum of Derrick's listening ear. His whole soul seemed as if filled by the idea of those he should never see again.

His last utterances were all about Sybil, Denzil, and their

mother ; he imagined himself to see them, to be speaking to them, to hear their voices, and to feel their kisses on his sodden face, over which the sea washed ever and anon ; and thus, happy it might be in his delirium, he passed away, and when more of the wreck broke up, the body dropped quietly into the sea, and was swept away in the trough to leeward, just as the grey dawn began to steal in, and the wind and waves to go down together, as if their object had been accomplished in the destruction of the ill-fated ship.

A boat that was not stove in, but was still dragged alongside by the fall-tackle, was now properly lowered. Ten men who survived got on board of her and shoved off from the wreck. But Derrick, who, in grief and weakness, had dropped asleep in the forecastle bunks, was unseen or forgotten by them in the hurry and selfishness of the moment ; thus when he awoke, the sun was nearly setting, and he was alone upon the sea, for the boat had been picked up by one of Her Majesty's steam vessels, the captain of which duly reported the circumstance, with the loss of the *Admiral*, to Lloyds and the owners in London.

Derrick's reflections on finding himself alone in the sinking ship were far from soothing. He had death before him, in its most terrible form, by slow starvation ; and all the horrors he had read or heard of in shipwrecked men occurred to him with vivid minutiae most painful to endure. But he prayed quite as much that he might be spared to fulfil the wishes of his master as for the prolongation of his own humble life, and the honest fellow's supplications were not uttered in vain, for ere the twilight came, a vessel bound for Tasmania took him off the wreck ; and now, after long, perilous, and penniless wanderings, he found himself once more safe in old England.

Sharkley, who had listened to all this narrative with deep interest—not that he cared a jot about the escapes, the sufferings, or the perseverance of the narrator, but because it formed a necessary sequence to the other portions of his story, which related to Montreal—now said,—

“After all you have undergone, you will, I hope be careful to whom you show, and with whom you trust, papers, upon the production of which, in a proper and legal manner, so much depends.”

“Make yourself perfectly easy on that head,” replied Braddon, winking knowingly, as he refilled his pipe.

“Lord Lamorna would give a good round sum, I doubt not—a good round sum, my dear sir, to possess them.”

“I am neither a dear sir, nor a cheap one,” growled Derrick ; “if you mean by Lord Lamorna Master Denzil, the papers are his already by right ; if you mean Downie Trevelyan, they

sha'n't be his, even if he piled up money as high as Bron Welli. Ah—he had ever an eye to the main chance."

"And haven't we all?"

"In some ways, perhaps, more or less ; but harkee, comrade, no more hints like that you gave just now. I had a kind, good master, and was his faithful servant. I am an old soldier, and know what honour is, though my coat be a tattered one."

"Yet, if I have heard aright, you were not *always* a soldier," sneered Sharkley, who despised monetary scruples that were beyond his comprehension.

"No," replied Braddon, his wrinkled cheek flushing with anger as he spoke ; "I was in my youth a smuggler, and here in Cornwall ain't ashamed to say so. I know well the Isles of Scilly, and every creek and crannie in those whose inhabitants are only gulls and rabbits ; for in them, as in the Piper's Hole at Tresco, and in many a place hereby known only to myself now, have I at the risk of my life by steel and lead, and storm, run the kegs of Cognac and the negrohead, that never paid duty to the Crown. But what of that ; I am not a smuggler now, though I had to bolt for being one ! I suppose few will dispute that you have been a lawyer in heart since you first saw the light, or learned to steal your school-mates' apples and nuts, till able to aim at bigger prizes—eh?"

"Come, don't let us quarrel after so pleasant an evening, Mr. Braddon," urged Sharkley, deprecatingly

"I ain't *Mister* Braddon," said the old soldier, doggedly ; "I am only plain Derrick Braddon, once full private, and No. 2006 in Captain Trevelyan's company of the Old Cornish ; and now, I think, I shall turn in."

Sharkley succeeded in talking the veteran into a better humour again, to throw him off his guard ; but his eyes never wandered from that left breast pocket where the outline of the tin case was distinctly visible, impressed on the worn-out, faded cloth.

As the storm continued, he remained all night at the Trevanion Arms ; and, after assuring himself that Derrick Braddon had no intention of leaving the neighbourhood in a hurry, an early hour next morning saw him spinning along the Cornwall and Devon Railway, in a corner of a third-class carriage, *en route*, to Rhoscadzhel.

CHAPTER LV.

PAR NOBILE FRATRUM !

" So, fellow, I am expected by you to swallow this 'tale of a tub,' which has been invented or revived solely for the purposes of monetary extortion !" exclaimed Downie Trevelyan, with the most intense and crushing hauteur, as he lay back in the same luxurious easy chair in which his uncle died, and played with his rich gold eye-glass and watered silk riband.

" It ain't a tale of a tub, my lord ; but of the wreck of a *steamer*—the steamer *Admiral* of Montreal," replied Sharkley meekly and sententiously.

Downie surveyed him through his double eye-glass, thinking that Sharkley was laughing covertly at him ; but no such thought was hovering in the mind of that personage, who was not much of a laugher at any time, save when he had successfully outwitted or jockeyed any one. He seemed very ill at ease, and sat on the extreme edge of a handsome brass-nailed morocco chair, with his tall shiny hat placed upon his knees, and his long, bare, dirty-looking fingers played the while somewhat nervously on the crown thereof, as he glanced alternately and irresolutely from the speaker to the titular Lady Lamorna, who was also eyeing him, as a species of natural curiosity, through *her* glass, and whose absence he devoutly wished, but feared to hint that she might withdraw.

She was reclining languidly on a sofa, with her fan, her lace handkerchief, her agate scent-bottle, and her everlasting half-cut novel—she was never known to read one quite through—lying beside her ; and she had only relinquished her chief employment of toying with Bijou, her waspish Maltese spaniel (which nestled in a little basket of mother-of-pearl, lined with white satin), when an aiguletted valet had ushered in " Mr. W. S. Sharkley, Solicitor."

" Leave us, Gartha, please," said her husband ; " I must speak with this person alone."

Curiosity was never a prominent feature in the character of Downie's wife, who was too languid, lazy, or aristocratically indifferent to care about anything ; so, with a proud sweep of her ample dress, she at once withdrew, followed by the gaze of the relieved Sharkley, who had a professional dislike for speaking before witnesses.

Mr. Sharkley's present surroundings were not calculated to add to his personal ease. The library at Rhoscadzhel—the same room in which poor Constance and Sybil had undergone, in pre-

sence of the pitying General Trecarrel, that humiliating interview, the bitterness of which the wife had never forgotten even to her dying hour, and in which Richard had, some time previously, found Downie by their dead uncle's side, with that suspicious-looking document in his hand, the history of which the former was too brotherly, too gentlemanly, and delicate ever to inquire about—the library, we say, was stately, spacious, and elegant enough, with its shelves of dark oak, filled by rare works in gay bindings, glittering in the sunlight ; with the white marble busts of the great and learned of other days, looking stolidly down from the florid cornice that crowned the cases ; with its massive and splendid furniture, gay with bright moroccoand gilt nails ; with the stained coats of arms, the koithgath and the seahorse of the Trevelyan, repeated again and again on the row of oriels that opened on one side, showing the far extent of field and chase, green upland and greener woodland, the present owner of which now sat eyeing him coldly, hostilely, and with that undoubted air and bearing which mark the high-bred and well-born gentleman—all combined to make the mean visitor feel very ill at ease.

He mentally contrasted these surroundings with those of his own dingy office, with its docquets of papers, dirty in aspect as in their contents ; its old battered charter-boxes filled with the misfortunes of half the adjacent villages—a room, to many a hob-nailed client and grimy miner, more terrible than the torture chamber of the Spanish Inquisition—and the comparison roused envy and covetousness keenly in his heart, together with an emotion of malicious satisfaction, that he had it in his power perhaps to deprive of all this wealth, luxury, and rank, the cold, calm, and pale-faced personage who eyed him from time to time with his false and haughty smile—an expression that, ere long, passed away, and then his visage became rigid and stony as that of the Comandatore in *Don Giovanni*, for whatever he might feel, it was not a difficult thing for a man who possessed such habitual habits of self-command as Downie Trevelyan, to appear at ease when he was far from being so. Yet Sharkley's mission tried him to the utmost, whatever real pride or temper he possessed.

" My lord," resumed the solicitor, while the revengeful emotion was in his heart—" if, indeed, you are entitled to be called ' my lord '—"

" Fellow, what *do* you mean by this studied insolence ? " demanded Downie, putting his hand on a silver bell, which, however, he did not ring, an indecision that caused a mocking smile to pass over the face of Sharkley, while the iris of his eyes dilated and shrunk as usual. " You are, I know, Sharkley the—aw, well

I must say it—the low practitioner who got up by forgery and otherwise—don't look round, sir, we have no witnesses—the case of the adventuress Devereaux against me and my family. So what brings you here now?"

"To tell you what I was beginning to state—the story of the wreck, by which your brother Richard, Lord Lamorna, perished at sea ; and to prove that the certificate of his marriage with Miss Constance Devereaux, daughter of a merchant trader in the city of Montreal, has been discovered and safely preserved, and is here in Cornwall now, together with his lordship's will."

Sharkley spoke with malicious bitterness, and Downie paused for a moment, ere he said,—

" You have seen them ?"

" Yes."

" Well, when I see those documents I shall believe in their existence—till then, you must hold me excused ; but even their existence does not prove their legality or authenticity. This is merely some new scheme to extort money," added Downie, almost passionately ; " but it shall not succeed ! That unhappy woman is dead—she died of paralysis, I have heard—the victim, I doubt not, of her own evil passions. Her son—"

" Your nephew, is with the army in India. Her daughter—"

" Has disappeared," said Downie, almost exultingly, " too probably taking a leaf out of her charming mamma's book ; and the army in Affghanistan has been destroyed—my son Audley's letters and the public papers assure me of that."

" Yet your lordship would like to see the documents ?"

" Or what may seem to be the documents—certainly ; in whose hands are they—yours ?"

" No—in those of one who may be less your lordship's friend—Derrick Braddon."

" Braddon !" said Downie, growing if possible paler than usual ; " Braddon, my brother's favourite servant, who was in all his secrets, and was with him in the Cornish regiment ?"

" The same, my lord."

" D—n—but this looks ill !" stammered Downie, thrown off his guard.

" For your lordship—very," said Sharkley with a covert smile.

Downie felt that he had forgot himself, so he said,

" Of course, this Braddon will show—perhaps deliver them to me."

" You are the last man on earth to whom he will *now* either show or deliver them. Be assured of that."

" For what reason, sir ?"

" The account he received from his sister and old Mike Treherne of your treatment of—well, I suppose we must call her yet—Mrs. Devereaux."

Downie's steel-grey eyes stared coldly, glassily, and spitefully at Sharkley. He longed for the power to pulverise, to annihilate him by a glance. He loathed and hated, yet feared this low-bred legal reptile, for he felt that he, and all his family, were somehow in his power. Yet he could not quite abandon his first position of indignant denial and proud incredulity.

He spread a sheet of foolscap paper before him, and making a broad margin on the left side thereof, an old office habit that still adhered to him, like many more that were less harmless, he dipped a pen in the inkstand, as if to make memoranda, and balancing his gold glasses on the bridge of his sharp slender nose, said, while looking keenly over them,

"Attend to *me*, sir—please. When was this pretended discovery made?"

"Some nine months ago."

"Where—I say, where?"

"At Montreal, in the chapel where this Latour, of whom we have heard so much, was curate."

"A rascally scheme—a forgery in which you have a share."

"Take care, my lord—I'll file a bill against you."

"You forget, scoundrel, that we are without witnesses."

"Well, there are a pair of us," was the impudent rejoinder; "but what good might such a scheme ever do an old pensioner like Derrick Braddon!"

"I do not pretend to fathom—for who can?—the secret motives of people of that class," said Downie, haughtily.

"Ay—or for that of it, any class," added Sharkley, as he shrugged his high bony shoulders.

"Relate to me, succinctly and clearly, all that this man has told you," said Downie Trevelyan, dipping his pen again into the silver inkstand; and as Sharkley proceeded, he listened to the narrative of his brother's sufferings and terrible death with impatience, and without other interest than that it served to prove his non-existence by a competent witness, who, were it necessary, might bring others of the crew who were present on the wreck, and had escaped in a boat.

Ere the whole story was ended, Downie was ghastly pale, and tremulous with the mingled emotions of rage and fear, doubt and mortification. He felt certain that in all this there must lie something to be laid further open, or be, if possible, crushed; and on being reassured by Sharkley that Derrick Braddon would "surrender the documents only with his life—"

"We must not think of violence, Mr. Sharkley," said he, coldly and mildly.

"Well, it ain't much in my line, my lord—though I have more than once got damages when a client struck me."

"We must have recourse to stratagem or bribery. For myself, I cannot, and shall not, come in personal contact with any man who is so insolent as to mistrust me, nor is it befitting I should do so. To you I shall entrust the task of securing and placing before me those alleged papers, for legal investigation, at your earliest convenience. For this, you shall receive the sum of two thousand pounds ; of this," he added, lowering his voice, "I shall give you, in the first place, a cheque for five hundred."

The eyes of Sharkley flashed, dilated, shrunk, and dilated again, when he heard the sum mentioned ; and rubbing his gorilla-like hands together, he said, with a chuckle peculiarly his own,—

"Never fear for me, my lord ; I'll work a hole for him—this Derrick Braddon. He spoke insultingly of *the profession* last night—but I'll work a hole for him."

With an emotion of angry contempt, which he strove in vain to conceal, Downie gave him a cheque for the first instalment of his bribe, taking care that it was a *crossed* one, payable only at his own bankers, so that if there was any trickery in this matter, he might be able to recal or trace it.

Sharkley carefully placed it in the recesses of a greasy-looking black pocket-book, tied with red tape, and saying something, with a cringing smile, to the effect that he had "in his time, paid many a fee to counsel, but never before received one in return," bowed himself out, with slavish and reiterated promises of fealty, discretion, and fulfilment of the task in hand ; but he quitted the stately porte-cochère, and long shady avenue of Rhoscadzhel, with very vague ideas, as yet, of how he was to win the additional fifteen hundred pounds.

So parted those brothers learned in the law.



CHAPTER LVI.

DOWNIE'S REFLECTIONS.

HIS odious visitor and tempter gone, Downie sat long, sunk in reverie. He lay back in the softly-cushioned chair, with his eyes vacantly and dreamily gazing through the lozenge panes, between the moulded mullions of the oriel windows, to where the sunlight fell in bright patches between the spreading oaks and elms, on the green sward of the chace, to where the brown deer nestled cosily among the tender ferns of spring, and to the distant isles of Scilly, afar in the deep blue sea : but he saw nothing of

all these. His mind was completely inverted, and his thoughts were turned inward. "The wildest novel," says Ouida, "was never half so wild as the real state of many a human life, that to superficial eyes looks serene and placid and uneventful enough ; but life is just the same as in the ages of *Oedipus' agony* and the *Orestes' crime*."

Doubtless, the reader thought it very barbarous in the fierce Mohammedan Amen Oollah Khan to twist off his elder brother's head, and so secure his inheritance ; but had the civilised Christian, Downie, been in the Khan's place, he would have acted precisely in the same way. The men's instincts were the same ; the modes of achievement only different.

But a month before this, and Downie, at his club in Pall Mall, had read with exultation, that of all General Elphinstone's army, his own son, Audley, and Doctor Brydone, of the Shah's 6th Regiment, had alone reached Jellalabad. Little cared he who perished on that disastrous retreat, so that his son was safe, for, selfish though he was, he loved well and dearly that son, his successor—the holder of a young life that was to stretch, perhaps, for half a century beyond his own shorter span. Now it had chanced that on the very morning of this remarkable visit he had seen, with disgust, in the *Times*, that among those alleged to be safe in the hands of an Afghan chief "was Ensign Denzil Devereaux, of the Cornish Light Infantry, an officer who, according to a letter received from Taj Mohammed Khan the Wuzeer, had succeeded in saving a colour of Her Majesty's 44th Regiment."

The daughter, whose artful plans upon his son's affections he had, as he conceived, so cleverly thwarted—the daughter Sybil gone no one knew whither ; the son a captive in a barbarous land beyond the Indian frontier, and their mother dead, the little family of Richard Trevelyan seemed on the verge of being quietly blotted out altogether ; and now here was this ill-omened Derrick Braddon, this Old Man of the Sea, come suddenly on the tapis, with his confounded papers !

General Elphinstone had died in the hands of the Afghans ; so might Denzil ; or he and the other survivors or hostages might yet be slain or—unless rescued by the troops from Candahar or Jellalabad—be sold by Ackbar Khan (as Downie had heard in his place in the House) to the chiefs in Toorkistan, after which they would never be heard of more. Oh, thought Downie, that I could but correspond with this Shireen Khan of the Kussilbashes ; doubtless such a worthy would "not be above taking a retaining fee."

By the dreadful slaughter in the Khyber Pass, and the capture of all the ladies and children, the sympathies, indignation, and

passions of the people were keenly roused at home ; thus if Denzil returned at this crisis, with the slightest military *éclat*, it would greatly favour any claims he might advance.

If the documents were genuine and could be proved so in a court of Law—or Justice (these being distinctly separate), were his title, his own honour (as Downie thought it), the honour, wealth and position, privileges and prospects of his wife and children, to be at the mercy of a mercenary wretch like Schotten Sharkley ; or of a broken-down, wandering, and obscure Chelsea pensioner, who possessed the papers in question ?

It was maddening even for one so cold in blood—so cautious and so slimy in his proceedings, as Mr. Downie Trevelyan. He had no great talents, but only instinct and cunning ; barrister though he was, the cunning of the pettifogger. A legal education had developed all that were corrupt and vile in his nature. A country squire, Downie would have been a blackleg on the turf and a grinding landlord ; a tradesman, he would have been far from being an honest one ; a soldier, he might have been a poltroon and a malingerer ; a legal man, he was—exactly what we find him, a master in subtlety, with a heart of stone. In the same luxurious chair in which he was now seated in fierce and bitter reverie, he had sat and regarded his brother's widow, in her pale and picturesque beauty, and watched the torture of her heart with something of the half amused expression of a cat when playing with the poor little mouse of which it intends to make a repast ; and now he sat there shrinking from vague terrors of the future, and in abhorrence of suspense ; but there was a species of dogged courage which he could summon to meet any legal emergency or danger, if he would but know its full extent. He was in the dark as yet, and his heart writhed within him at the prospect of coming peril, even as that of Constance had been wrung by the emotions of sorrow and unmerited shame.

He knew himself to be degraded by acting the part of a conspirator in all this ; yet how much was at stake ! No family in ancient Cornwall was older in history or tradition than his, and none was more honoured ; yet here by intrigue, fatality, and the debasing influence of association was he, the twelfth Lord Lamorna, the coadjutor of a man whose father had been a poor ratcatcher, and if report said true, a felon. He felt as if on Damien's bed of steel, or as if the velvet cushions of his chair had been stuffed with long iron nails, and he repeated bitterly aloud,—

“ What ! am I to be but a *locum tenens* after all—and to whom ? Denzil Devereaux—this *filius nullius*, this son of an adventuress, or of nobody perhaps ! ”

The grave, grim, and somewhat grotesque portraits of Launce-lot, Lord Lamorna, in Cavalier dress—he who hid from Fairfax's troopers in the Trewoofe ; of Lord Henry, with beard, ruff, and ribbed armour, who was Governor of Rougemont in Devon, and whose scruples did not find him favour with the "Virgin" Queen ; and even of his late uncle, with his George IV. wig, false teeth, and brass-buttoned blue swallow-tail, seemed to look coldly and contemptuously down on him.

"Pshaw !" muttered Downie, "am I a fool or a child to be swayed by such fancies ?—I should think not ; the days of superstition are gone !"

Yet he felt an influence, or something, he knew not what, and averted his stealthy eyes from the painted faces of the honester dead.

The irony of the malevolent and the vulgar ; the gossip and surmises of the anonymous press ; the "Honourable" cut from Audley's name in the Army List, the Peerage, and elsewhere, and from that of his daughter Gartha, who was just about to be brought out, and had begun to anticipate, with all a young beauty's pleasure, the glories of her first presentation at Court, were all before him now.

To have felt, enjoyed, and to lose all the sweets of rank, of wealth, of power and patronage ; the worship of the empty world, the slavish snobbery of trade, to have been congratulated by all the begowned and bewigged members of the Inns of Court, and by all his tenantry, for nothing—all this proved too much for Downie's brain, and certainly too much for his heart. It was intolerable.

He thought of his cold, unimpressionable, pale-faced, and aristocratic wife deprived of her place (not of rank, for she was a peer's daughter), through that "Canadian connection" of Richard's, as they were wont to term poor Constance—an issue to be tried at the bar, every legal celebrity of the day perhaps retained in the cause ; money wasted, bets made, and speculation rife ; himself eventually shut out from a sphere in which he had begun to figure, and to figure well ! Would, he thought, that the sea had swallowed up Braddon, even as it had done his master ! Would that some Afghan bullet might lay low this upstart lad, this Denzil Devereaux, and then his claims and papers might be laughed to scorn ! Downie had never been without a secret dread of hearing more of Constance and her marriage, and that one day or other it might admit of legal proof, and now the dread was close and palpable.

He cherished a dire vengeance against his dead brother, for what he deemed his duplicity in contracting such a marriage, unknown to all ; and in his unjust ire forgot their late uncle's

insane family pride, which was the real cause of all that had occurred.

Novelists, dramatists, and humourists, are usually severe upon the legal profession ; yet in our narrative, Downie and his agent Sharkley are given but as types of a bad class of men. Far be it from us to think evil generally of that vast body from whose ranks have sprung so many brilliant orators, statesmen, and writers, especially in England ; though Lord Brougham, in his *Autobiography*, designates the law as “the cursedest of all cursed professions,” and even Sir Walter Scott, a member of the Scottish College of Justice, where the practice is loose, often barbarous and antiquated, wrote in his personal memoirs, that he liked it little at first, and it pleased God to make that little less upon further acquaintance ; for the spirit and chicanery of the profession are liable to develop to the full that which the Irish, not inaptly, term “the black drop” which is in so many human hearts.

Downie Trevelyan sat long buried in thoughts that galled and wrung his spirit of self-love, till the house-bell rang, sleek Mr. Jasper Funnel with his amplitude of paunch and white waistcoat came to announce that “luncheon was served,” and Mr. Boxer, powdered and braided elaborately, came to ascertain at what time “her ladyship wished the carriage ;” and even these trivial incidents, by their suggestiveness, were not without adding fuel to his evil instincts and passions.

Three entire days passed away—days of keen suspense and intense irritation to Downie, though far from being impulsive by nature, yet he heard nothing of his tool or agent, whom he began to doubt, fearing that he had pocketed the five hundred pounds, or obtained the documents thereby, and gone over with them to the enemy. But just as the third evening was closing in, and when, seated in the library alone, he was considering how he should find some means of communicating with Sharkley—write he would not, being much too cautious and legal to commit himself in that way, forgetting also that the other would be equally so—the door was thrown noiselessly open, and a servant as before announced “Mr. W. S. Sharkley, Solicitor,” and the cadaverous and unwholesome-looking attorney, in his rusty black suit, sidled with a cringing air into the room, his pale visage and cat-like eyes wearing an unfathomable expression, in which one could neither read success nor defeat.

“Be seated, Mr. Sharkley,” said his host, adding in a low voice, and with a piercing glance, when the door was completely closed, and striving to conceal his agitation, “You have the papers, I presume ?”

“Your lordship shall hear,” replied the other, who, prior to

saying more, opened the door suddenly and sharply, to see that no "Jeames" had his curious ear at the keyhole, and then resumed his seat.

But before relating all that took place at this interview, we must go back a little in our story, to detail that which Mr. Sharkley would have termed his *modus operandi* in the matter.



CHAPTER LVII.

MR. W. S. SHARKLEY'S PLOT.

As Sharkley travelled back towards the little mining hamlet, where the Trevanian Arms stood conspicuously where two roads branched off, one towards Lanteglos, and the other towards the sea, he revolved in his cunning mind several projects for obtaining possession of the papers ; but knowing that the old soldier mistrusted him, that he was quite aware of their value, and that he was as obstinate in his resolution to preserve them, as he was faithful and true to the son of Richard Trevelyan, there was an extreme difficulty in deciding on any one line or plan for proper or honest action, so knavery alone had scope.

Could he, out of the five hundred pounds received to account, but bribe Derrick Braddon to *lend* the papers ostensibly for a time, receiving in return a receipt in a feigned handwriting, with a forged or fancy signature, so totally unlike that used by the solicitor, that he might afterwards safely repudiate the document, and deny he had ever written it !

To attempt to possess them by main force never came within the scope of Sharkley's imagination, for the old soldier was strong and wiry as a young bull, and had been famous as a wrestler in his youth ; and then force was illegal, whatever craft might be.

Ultimately he resolved to ignore the subject of the papers, and seem to forget all about them ; to talk on other matters, military if possible (though such were not much in Sharkley's way), and thus endeavour to throw Braddon off his guard, and hence get them into his possession by a very simple process—one neither romantic nor melo-dramatic, but resorted to frequently enough by the lawless, in London and elsewhere—in fact by drugging his victim ; and for this purpose, by affecting illness and deceiving a medical man, he provided himself with ample means by the way.

Quitting the railway he hastened on foot next day towards the picturesque little tavern, his only fear being that Derrick might

have suddenly changed his mind, and being somewhat erratic now, have gone elsewhere.

As he walked onward, immersed in his own selfish thoughts, scheming out the investment of the two thousand pounds, perhaps of *more*, for why should he not wring or screw more out of his employer's purse?—it was ample enough!—the beauty of the spring evening and of the surrounding scenery had no soothing effect on the heart of this human reptile. The picturesque banks of the winding Camel, then rolling brown in full flood from recent rains; Boscastle on its steep hill, overlooking deep and furzy hollows, and its inlet or creek where the blue sea lay sparkling in light under the storm-beaten headlands and desolate cliffs; away in the distance on another hand, the craggy ridges of Bron Welli, and the Row Tor all reddened by the setting sun, were unnoticed by Sharkley, who ere long found himself under the pretty porch and swinging sign-board of the little inn (all smothered in its bright greenery, budding flowers, and birds' nests), where the scene of his nefarious operations lay.

A frocked waggoner, ruddy and jolly, whipping up his sleek horses with one hand while wiping the froth of the last tankard from his mouth with the other, departed from the door with his team as Sharkley entered and heard a voice that was familiar, singing vociferously upstairs.

"Who is the musical party?" asked he of the round-headed, short-necked and barrel-shaped landlord, whose comely paunch was covered by a white apron.

"Your friend the old pensioner, Mr. Sharkley," replied the other, "and main noisy he be."

"Friend?" said Sharkley nervously; "he ain't a friend 'of mine—only a kind of client in a humble way."

"I wouldn't have given such house-room; but trade is bad—the coaches are all off the road now, and business be all taken by the rail to Launceston, Bodmin, and elsewhere."

"Has he been drinking?"

"Yes."

"Pretty freely?" asked Sharkley hopefully.

"Well—yes; we're licensed to get drunk on the premises."

"Come," thought the emissary, "this is encouraging! His intellect," he added aloud, "is weak; after a time he grows furious and is apt to accuse people of robbing him, especially of certain papers of which he imagines himself the custodian; it is quite a monomania."

"A what, sur?"

"A monomania."

"I hopes as he don't bite; but any way," said the landlord,

who had vague ideas of hydrophobia, "I had better turn him out at once, as I want no bobberies here."

"No—no; that would be precipitate. I shall try to soothe him over; besides, I have express business with him to-night."

"But if he won't be soothed?" asked Boniface anxiously.

"Then you have the police station at hand."

Meanwhile they could hear Derrick above them, drumming on the bare table with a pint-pot, and singing some barrack-room ditty of which the elegant refrain was always,—

"Stick to the colour, boys, while there's a rag on it,
And tickle them behind with a touch of the bagonet :
So, love, farewell, for *all* for a-marching!" ,,

As Sharkley entered, it was evident that the old soldier, whose voice rose at times into a shrill, discordant, and hideous falsetto, had been imbibing pretty freely; his weather-beaten face was flushed, his eyes watery, and his voice somewhat husky, but he was in excellent humour with himself and all the world. The visitor's sharp eyes took in the whole details of the little room occupied by his victim; a small window, which he knew to be twelve feet from a flower-bed outside; a bed in a corner; two Windsor chairs, a table and wash-stand, all of the most humble construction; these, with Derrick's tiny carpet-bag and walking staff, comprised its furniture.

"Come along, Master Sharkley—glad to see you—glad to see any one—it's dreary work drinking alone. This is my billet, and there is a shot in the locker yet—help yourself," he added, pushing a large three-handled tankard of ale across the table.

"Thank you, Braddon," replied the other, careful to omit the prefix of "Mr." which Derrick always resented, "and you must share mine with me. Have you heard the news?"

"From where—India?"

"Yes."

"And what are they that I have not heard—tell me that, Mr. Sharkley—what are they that I have *not* heard?" said Braddon, with the angry emphasis assumed at times unnecessarily by the inebriated.

"Is it that your young master is shut up among the Afghans, and likely, I fear, to remain so?"

"Her Majesty the Queen don't think so—no, sir—d—n me, whatever you, and such as you, may think," responded Derrick, becoming suddenly sulky and gloomy.

"Who *do* you mean, Braddon," asked the other, drinking, and eying him keenly over his pewter pot.

"Did you see to-day's *Gazette*?"

"The *Bankruptcy* list?"

"Bankruptcy be—" roared Braddon, contemptuously, striking his clenched hand on the deal table; "no the *War Office Gazette*."

Mr. W. S. Sharkley, faintly and timidly indicated that as it was a part of the newspapers which possessed but small interest for him, he certainly had not seen it.

"Well, that is strange now," said Derrick; "it is almost the only bit of a paper I ever read."

"It ain't very lively, I should think."

"Ain't it—well, had you looked there to-day, you would have seen that young master Denzil—that is my Lord Lamorna as should be—has been gazetted to a Lieutenancy in the old Cornish—yes, in the-old-Cornish-Light-Infantry!" added Derrick, running five words into one.

"Indeed! but he may die in the hands of the enemy for all that—though I hope not."

"Give me your hand, Mr. Sharkley, for that wish," said Derrick, with tipsy solemnity; "moreover, he is to have the third class of the Dooranee Empire, whatever the dickens that may be. I've drawed my pension to-day, Mr. Sharkley, and I mean to spend every penny of it in wetting the young master's new commission, and the Dooranee Empire to boot. Try the beer again—it's home-brewed, and a first-rate quencher—here's-his-jolly good-health!"

"So say I—his jolly good health."

"With three times three!"

"Yes," added Sharkley, as he wrung the pensioner's proffered hand, "and three to that."

Derrick, who, though winding up the day on beer, had commenced it with brandy, was fast becoming more noisy and confused, to his wary visitor's intense satisfaction.

"Yes—yes—Master Denzil will escape all and come home safe, please God," said Derrick, becoming sad and sentimental for a minute; "yet in my time I heard many a fellow—yes, many a fellow—before we went into action, or were just looking to our locks, and getting the cartridges loose, say to another, 'write for me,' to my father, or mother, or it might be 'poor Bess, or Nora,' meaning his wife, 'in case I get knocked on the head,' and I have seen them shot in their belts within ten minutes after. I often think—yes, by jingo I do—that a man sometimes knows when death is a-nigh him, for I have heard some say they were sure they'd be shot, and shot they were sure enough; while others—I for one—were always sure they'd escape. It's what we soldiers call a presentiment; but of course, you, as a lawyer, can know nothing about it. With sixty rounds of ammunition at his back, a poor fellow will have a better chance of seeing

Heaven than if he died with a blue bagfull of writs and rubbish."

Then Derrick indulged in a tipsy fit of laughter, mingled with tears, as he said,

" You'd have died o'laughing, Mr. Sharkley, if you'd seen the captain my master one day—but perhaps you don't care about stories?"

" By all means, Braddon," replied Sharkley, feeling in his vest pocket with a fore-finger and thumb for a phial which lurked there; " I dearly love to hear an old soldier's yarn."

" Well, it was when we were fighting against the rebels in Canada—the rebels under Papineau. We were only a handful, as the saying is—a handful of British troops, and they were thousands in number—discontented French, Irish Rapparees, and Yankee sympathisers, armed with everything they could lay hands on; but we licked them at St. Denis and St. Charles, on the Chamblay river—yes, and lastly at Napierville, under General Sir John Colborne; and pretty maddish we Cornish lads were at them, for they had just got one of our officers, a poor young fellow named Lieutenant George Weir, into their savage hands by treachery, after which they tied him to a cart-tail, and cut him into joints with his own sword. Well—where was I?—at Napierville. We were lying in a field in extended order to avoid the discharge of a field gun or two, that the devils had got into position against us, when a ball from one ploughed up the turf in a very open place, and Captain Trevelyan seated himself right in the furrow it had made, and proceeded to light a cigar, laughing as he did so.

" Are you wise to sit there, right in the line of fire?" asked the colonel, looking down from his horse.

" Yes," says my master.

" How so?"

" Master took the cigar between his fingers, and while watching the smoke curling upwards, said,

" You see, colonel, that *another* cannon ball is extremely unlikely to pass in the same place; two never go after each other thus."

" But he had barely spoken, ere the shako was torn off his head by a second shot from the field piece; so everybody laughed, while he scrambled out of the furrow, looking rather white and confused, though pretending to think it as good a joke as any one else—that was funny wasn't it!"

So, while Derrick lay back and laughed heartily at his own reminiscence, Sharkley, quick as lightning, poured into his tankard a little phial-full of morphine, a colourless but powerful narcotic extracted from opium. He then took an opportunity of

casting the phial into the fire unseen, and by the aid of the poker effectually concealed it.

"What a fine thing it would have been for Mr. Downie Trevelyan if that rebel shot had been a little lower down—eh, Derrick?" said he, chuckling.

"Not while the proud old lord lived, for he ever loved my master best."

"But he is in possession now—and that you know, is nine points of the law."

"Yes—and he has a heart as hard as Cornish granite," said Braddon, grinding his set teeth ; "aye, hard as the Logan Stone of Treryn Dinas ! Here is confusion to him and all such !" he added, energetically, as he drained the drugged tankard to the dregs ; "if such a fellow were in the army, he'd be better known to the Provost Marshal than to the Colonel or Adjutant, and would soon find himself at shot-drill, with B.C. branded on his side. But here's Mr. Denzil's jolly-good-health-and-hooray-for-the-Dooranee-Empire !" he continued, and applied the empty tankard mechanically to his lips, while his eyes began to roll, as the four corners of the room seemed to be in pursuit of each other round him. "I dreamt I was on the wreck last night—ugh ! and saw the black fins of the sea-lawyers, sticking up all about us."

"Sea-lawyers—what may they be ?"

"Sharks," replied Braddon, his eyes glaring with a curious expression, that hovered between fun and ferocity, at his companion, whose figure seemed suddenly to waver, and then to multiply.

"Ha, ha, very good ; an old soldier must have his joke."

"So had my master, when he sat in the fur-ur-urrow made by the shell. You see, we were engaged with Canada rebels at Napierville—ville—yes exactly, at Naperville, when a twelve-pound shot—"

He was proceeding, with twitching mouth and thickened utterance, to relate the whole anecdote deliberately over again, when Sharkley, who saw that he was becoming so fatuously tipsy that further concealment was useless, rose impatiently, and abruptly left the room, to give the landlord some fresh hints for his future guidance,

"Halt !" come back here—here, you sir, I say !" exclaimed Braddon, in a low, fierce, and husky voice, as this sudden and unexplained movement seemed to rouse all his suspicions and quicken his perceptive qualities ; but in attempting to leave his chair he fell heavily on the floor.

He grew ghastly pale as he staggered into a sitting posture. Tipsy and stupefied though he was, some strange conviction of

treachery came over him ; he staggered, or dragged himself, partly on his hands and knees, towards the bed, and drawing from his breast pocket the tin case, with the documents so treasured, by a last effort of strength and of judgment, thrust it between the mattress and palliasse, and flung himself above it.

Then, as the powerful narcotic he had imbibed overspread all his faculties, he sank into a deep and dreamless but snorting slumber, that in its heaviness almost boded death !

* * * * *

The noon of the next day was far advanced when poor old Derrick awoke to consciousness, but could, with extreme difficulty, remember where he was. A throat parched, as if fire was scorching it ; an overpowering headache and throbbing of the temples ; hot and tremulous hands, with an intense thirst, served to warn him that he must have been overnight, that which he had not been for many a year, very tipsy and "totally unfit for duty."

He staggered up in search of a water-jug, and then found that he had lain abed with his clothes on. A pleasant breeze came through the open window ; the waves of the bright blue sea were rolling against Tintagel cliffs and up Boscastle creek ; hundreds of birds were twittering in the warm spring sunshine about the clematis and briar that covered all the tavern walls, and the hum of the bee came softly and gratefully to his ear, as he strove to recall the events of the past night.

Sharkley !—it had been spent with Sharkley the solicitor, and where now was he ?

The papers ! He mechanically put his trembling hand to his coat pocket, and then, as a pang of fear shot through his heart, under the mattress.

They were not there ; vacantly he groped and gasped, as recollections flashed upon him, and the chain of ideas became more distinct ; madly he tossed up all the bedding and scattered it about. The case was gone, and with it the precious papers, too, were gone—GONE !

Sobered in an instant by this overwhelming catastrophe—most terribly sobered—a hoarse cry of mingled rage and despair escaped him. The landlord, who had been listening for an out-break of some kind, now came promptly up.

"Beast, drunkard, fool that I have been !" exclaimed Derrick, in bitter accents of self-reprobation ; "this is how I have kept my promise to a dying master—duped by the first scoundrel who came across me ! I have been juggled—drugged, perhaps—then juggled, and robbed after !"

"Robbed of what ?" asked the burly landlord, laughing.

"Papers—my master's papers," groaned Derrick.

"Bah—I thought as much; now look ye here, old fellow—" "Robbed by a low lawyer," continued Derrick, hoarsely; "and no fiend begotten in hell can be lower in the scale of humanity or more dangerous to peaceful society. Oh, how often has poor master said so," he added, waxing magniloquent, and almost beside himself with grief and rage; "how often have I heard him say, 'I have had so much to do with lawyers, that I have lost all proper abhorrence for their master, the devil.' "

"Now, I ain't going to stand any o' this nonsense—just you clear out," said the landlord, peremptorily.

Then as his passionate Cornish temper got the better of his reason, Derrick on hearing this suddenly seized Jack Trevanion's successor by the throat, and dashing him on the floor, accused him of being art and part, or an aider and abettor of the robbery, in which, to say truth, he was not. His cries speedily brought the county constabulary, to whom, by Sharkley's advice, he had previously given a hint, and before the sun was well in the west, honest Derrick Braddon was raving almost with madness and despair under safe keeping in the nearest station house.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE HOPE OF THE DEAD.

THE disappearance of the papers which had so terrible an effect upon the nervous system, and usually iron frame of Derrick Braddon, is accounted for by the circumstance that Sharkley on returning to see how matters were progressing in the room, lingered for a moment by the half-opened door, and saw his dupe pale, gasping, muttering, and though half-senseless, yet conscious enough to feel a necessity for providing against any trickery or future contingency, in the act of concealing the tin case among his bedding, from whence it was speedily drawn, after he had flung himself in sleepy torpor above it; and then stealing softly down stairs with the prize, Sharkley paid his bill and departed without loss of time and in high spirits, delighted with his own success.

Too wary to start westward in the direction of Rhoscadzhel, he made an ostentatious display of departing by a hired dog-cart for his own residence, at the village or small market town (which was afflicted by his presence) in quite an opposite direction. From thence, by a circuitous route, he now revisited his employer, and hence the delay which occasioned the latter so much torture and anxiety.

"Two thousand—a beggarly sum!" thought Sharkley, scornfully and covetously, as he walked up the stately and over-arching avenue, and found himself under the groined arches of the *porte-cochère*, the pavement of which was of black and white tessellated marble; "why should I not demand double the sum, or more—yes, or more,—he is in my power, in my power, is he not?" he continued, with vicious joy, through his set teeth, while his eyes filled with green light, and the glow of avarice grew in his flinty heart, though even the first sum mentioned was a princely one to him.

Clutching the tin case with a vulture-like grasp, he broadly and coarsely hinted his wish to Downie, who sat in his library chair, pale, nervous, and striving to conceal his emotion, while hearing a narration of his late proceedings at the Trevanian Arms; and hastily drawing a cheque book towards him, he filled up another bank order, saying,—

"There, sir, this is a cheque for *two* thousand pounds; surely two thousand five hundred are quite enough for all you have done in procuring for my inspection, documents which may prove but as so much waste paper after all."

"Their examination will prove that such is not the case," said Sharkley, as he gave one of his ugly smiles, scrutinised the document, and slowly and carefully consigned it to where its predecessor lay, in the greasy old pocket-book, wherein many a time and oft the hard-won earnings of the poor, the unfortunate and confiding, had been swallowed up. When Downie had heard briefly and rapidly a narration of the means by which the papers had been abstracted, he rather shrunk with disgust from a contemplation of them; they seemed so disreputable, so felonious and vile!

He had vaguely hoped that by the more constitutional and legal plans of bribery and corruption Mr. W. S. Sharkley might have received them from the custodian; but now they were in his hands and he was all impatience, tremulous with eagerness, and spectacles on nose, to peruse them, and test their value by that legal knowledge which he undoubtedly possessed.

His fingers, white and delicate, and on one of which sparkled the magnificent diamond ring which his late uncle had received when on his Russian embassy, literally trembled and shook, as if with ague, when he opened the old battered and well-worn tin case. The first document drawn forth had a somewhat unpromising appearance; it was sorely soiled, frayed, and seemed to have been frequently handled.

"What the deuce is this, Mr. Sharkley?" asked Downie, with some contempt of tone.

"Can't say, my lord—never saw such a thing before ; it ain't a writ or a summons, surely !"

It was simply a soldier's "Parchment Certificate," and ran thus :—

"Cornish Regiment of Light Infantry."

"These are to certify that Derrick Braddon, Private, was born in the Parish of Gulval, Duchy of Cornwall ; was enlisted there for the said corps, &c., was five years in the West Indies, ten in North America, and six at Gibraltar ; was twice wounded in action with the Canadian rebels, and has been granted a pension of one shilling per diem. A well conducted soldier, of unexceptionably good character." Then followed the signature of his colonel and some other formula.

"Pshaw !" said Downie, tossing it aside ; but the more wary Sharkley, to obliterate all links or proofs of conspiracy, deposited it carefully in the fire, when it shrivelled up and vanished ; so the little record of his twenty-one years' faithful service, of his two wounds, and his good character, attested by his colonel, whom he had ever looked up to as a demigod, and which Derrick had borne about with him as Gil Blas did his patent of nobility, was lost to him for ever.

But more than ever did Downie's hands tremble when he drew forth the other documents ; when he saw their tenor, and by the mode in which they were framed, worded, stamped, and signed, he was compelled to recognise their undoubted authority! A sigh of mingled rage and relief escaped him ; but, as yet, no thought of compunction. He glanced at the fire, at the papers, and at Sharkley, more than once in succession, and hesitated either to move or speak. He began to feel now that the lingering of his emissary in his presence, when no longer wanted, was intolerable ; but he was too politic to destroy the papers before him, though no other witness was present.

Full of secret motives themselves, each of these men, by habit and profession, was ever liable to suspect secret motives in every one else ; and each was now desirous to be out of the other's presence ; Downie, of course, most of all. The lower in rank and more contemptible in character, perhaps was less so, having somewhat of the vulgar toady's desire to linger in the presence and atmosphere of one he deemed a greater, certainly more wealthy, and a titled man ; till the latter said with a stiff bow full of significance—

"I thank you, sir, and have paid you ; these are the documents I wished to possess."

"I am glad your lordship is pleased with my humble services," replied Sharkley, but still tarrying irresolutely.

"Is there anything more you have to communicate to me?"

"No, my lord."

"Then I have the—I must wish you good evening."

Sharkley brushed his shiny hat with his dusty handkerchief, and the wish for a further gratuity was hovering on his lips.

"You have been well paid for your services, surely?"

"Quite, my lord—that is—but—"

"No one has seen those papers, I presume?" asked Downie.

"As I have Heaven to answer to, no eye has looked on them while in my hands—my own excepted."

"Good—I am busy—you may go," said Downie, haughtily, and as he had apparently quite recovered his composure, he rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

"Show this—person out, please," said Downie.

And in a moment more Sharkley was gone. The door closed, and they little suspected they were never to meet again.

"Thank God, he is gone! Useful though the scoundrel has been, and but for his discovery of those papers we know not what may have happened, his presence was suffocating me!" thought Downie.

The perceptions of the latter were sufficiently keen to have his *amour propre* wounded by a peculiar sneering tone and more confident bearing in Sharkley; there had been a companionship in the task in hand, which lowered him to the level of the other, and the blunt rejoinder he had used so recently—"there are a *pair* of us"—still rankled in his memory. Thus he had felt that he could not get rid of him too soon, or too politely to all appearance; and with a grimace of mingled satisfaction and contempt, he saw the solicitor's thin, ungainly figure lessening as he shambled down the long and beautiful avenue of elms and oaks, which ended at the grey stone pillars, that were surmounted each by a grotesque koithgath, *sejant*, with its four paws resting on a shield, charged with a Cavallo Marino, rising from the sea.

"And now for another and final perusal of these most accursed papers!" said Downie Trevelyan, huskily.

The first was the certificate of marriage, between Richard Pencarrow Trevelyan, Captain in the Cornish Light Infantry, and Constance Devereaux of Montreal, duly by *banus*, at the chapel of Père Latour. Then followed the date, and attestation, to the effect, "that the above-named parties were this day

married by me, as hereby certified, at Ste. Marie de Montreal.

"C. LATOUR, *Catholic Curé,*
"BAPTISTE OLIVIER, *Acolyte.*
"DERRICK BRADDON, *Private*
"Cornish Light Infantry.

"JEHAN DURASSIER, *Sacristan.*"

About this document there could not be a shadow of a doubt—even the water-mark was anterior to the date, and the brow of Downie grew very dark as he read it; darker still grew that expression of malevolent wrath, and more swollen were the veins of his temples as he turned to the next document, which purported to be the "Last Will and Testament of Richard Pencarrow, Lord Lamorna," and which after the usual dry formula concerning his just debts, testamentary and funeral expenses, continued, "*I give, devise, and bequeath* unto Constance Devereaux, Lady Lamorna, my wife," the entire property, (then followed a careful enumeration thereof,) into which he had come by the death of his uncle Audley, Lord Lamorna, for the term of her natural life; and after her death to their children Denzil and Sybil absolutely, in the several portions to follow. The reader Downie (to whom a handsome bequest was made), General Treccarrel, and the Rector of Porthellick were named as Executors, and then followed the duly witnessed signature of the Testator, written in a bold hand LAMORNA, and dated at Montreal, about nine months before.

"Hah!" exclaimed Downie, through his clenched teeth; "here is that in my hand, which, were Audley a wicked or undutiful son, might effect wonders at Rhoscadzhel, and furnish all England with food for gossip and surmise; but that shall never, never be; nor shall son nor daughter of that Canadian adventuress ever place their heads under this roof tree of ours!"

And as he spoke, he fiercely crumpled up the will and the certificate together.

Then he paused, spread them out upon his writing table, and smoothing them over, read them carefully over again. As he did so, the handsome face, the honest smile and manly figure of his brother Richard came upbraidingly to memory; there were thoughts of other and long-remembered days of happy boyhood, of their fishing, their bird-nesting expeditions, and of an old garret in which they were wont to play when the days were wet, or the snow lay deep on the hills. How was it, that, till now forgotten, the old garret roof, with its rafters big and brown, and which seemed then such a fine old place for sport, with the very sound of its echoes, and of the rain without as it

came pouring down to gorge the stone gutters of the old house, came back to memory now, with Richard's face and voice, out of the mists of nearly half a century? "It was one of those flashes of the soul that for a moment unshroud to us the dark depths of the past." Thus he really wavered in purpose, and actually thought of concealing the documents in his strong box, to the end that there they might be found after his death, and after he had enjoyed the title for what remained to him of life.

Would not such duplicity be unfair to his own sons, and to his daughter? was the next reflection.

And if fate permitted Denzil to escape the perils of the Afghan war, was the son of that mysterious little woman, or was her daughter—the daughter of one whom he doubted not, and wished not to doubt—had entrapped his silly brother into a secret marriage, in a remote and sequestered chapel, and whose memory he actually loathed—ever to rule and reside in Rhoscadzhel?

No—a thousand times no! Then muttering the lines from Shakespeare,—

"Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls.
Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
Devised at first to keep the strong in awe."

he drew near the resplendent grate of burnished steel, and resolutely casting in both documents, thrust them with the aid of the poker deep among the fuel, and they speedily perished. The deed was done, and could no more be recalled than the last year's melted snow!

He watched the last sparks die out in the tinder ashes of those papers, on the preservation and production of which so much depended, so much was won and lost; and a sigh of relief was blended with his angry laugh.

He felt that then, indeed, the richly carpeted floor beneath his feet; the gilded roof above his head, the sweet, soft landscape—one unusually so for bold and rugged Cornwall—that stretched away in the soft, hazy, and yellow twilight, and all that he had been on the verge of losing, were again more surely his, and the heritage of his children, and of theirs in the time to come, and that none "of Banquo's line"—none of that strange woman's blood, could ever eject them now!

Even Derrick's old tin-case—lest, if found, it should lead to a trace or suspicion of where the papers had gone—he carefully, and with a legal caution worthy of his satellite the solicitor, beat out of all shape with his heel and threw it into the fire, heaping the coals upon it.

This was perhaps needless in Downie Trevelyan, that smooth, smug, closely shaven, and white-shirted lawyer-lord, that man

of legal facts and stern truths, so abstemious, temperate, and regular in his habits and attendance at church, and to all the outward tokens of worldly rectitude. Do what he might, none could, would, or dare believe evil of him !

Yet, after the excitement he had undergone, there were moments when he felt but partially satisfied with himself, till force of habit resumed its sway—moments when he remained sunk in thought, with his eyes fixed on that portion of the sea and sky where the sun had set, while the sombre twilight deepened around, and strange shadows were cast by the oriels across the library floor.

“ For what have I done this thing ? ” thought he ; “ for my children of course, rather than for myself. I would that I had not been tempted, for nothing on earth remains for ever—nothing ! ” And as he muttered thus, his eyes rested on the distant Isles of Scilly that loomed like dark purple spots in the golden sea, which yet weltered in the ruddy glory of the sun that had set; and he reflected, he knew not why, for it was not Downie’s wont, on the mutability of all human things and wishes, of the change that inexorable Time for ever brought about, and of the futility of all that man might attempt to do in the hope of perpetuity ; for did not even the mighty sea and firm land change places in the fulness of years !

Where now was all the land tradition named as Lyonesse of old—the vast tract which stretched from the eastern shore of Mount’s Bay, even to what are now the Isles of Scilly, on which his dreamy eyes were fixed—the land where once, in story and in verse we are told,

“ That all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;
Until king Arthur’s Table, man by man,
Had fall’n in Lyonesse about their lord.”

There, where now he saw the sea rolling between the rocky isles and the Land’s End, were once green waving woods and verdant meadows, lands that were arable, mills whose busy wheels revolved in streams now passed away, and one hundred-and-forty parish churches, whose bells summoned the people to prayer, but which are all now—if we are to believe William of Worcester—submerged by the encroaching sea ; yet whether gradually, or by one mighty throe of nature, on that day when the first of the line of Trevelyan swam his wonderful horse from the north-western isle, back to the rent and riven land, we know not, but so the story runs.

From these day-dreams, such as he was seldom used to indulge in, Downie’s mind rapidly reverted to practical considerations.

"Two thousand five hundred pounds in two cheques!" he muttered ; "will not my bankers, and more than all, Gorbelly and Culverhole, my solicitors, wonder what singular service a creature such as this William Schotten Sharkley can possibly have rendered me, to receive so large a sum? If that drunken old soldier, Braddon, tells this story of his last meeting with Sharkley, and the subsequent loss of the papers, and permits himself to make a noise about them, may there not be many who, while remembering the former affair, by putting this and that together, will patch up a scandalous story after all? Bah —let them ; there lie the proofs!" he added, glancing with a fierce and vindictive smile at the fragments of black tinder which yet fluttered in the grate.

So perished, at his remorseless hands, all the past hopes of the tender and affectionate dead, and all the present hopes of the living—of Richard and his wife who were buried so far apart—of Denzil and his sister, who were separated by fate, by peril, and so many thousand miles of land and sea !

But our story may have a sequel for all that.



CHAPTER LIX.

RETRIBUTION.

GREATLY to the surprise of the granter, the two cheques for £500 and £2000 respectively, were never presented at his bankers, and Mr. Sharkley returned no more to his office ; that dingy chamber of torture, with its dusty dockets, ink-spotted table, and tin charter-boxes arranged in formal rows upon an iron frame, and its damp discoloured walls, ornamented by time-tables, bills of sale, and fly-blown prospectuses, knew him never again ; and days, weeks, and months rolled on, but he was never seen by human eye after the time he issued from the lodge-gate of Rhoscadzhel, and the keeper, with a contemptuous bang, clanked it behind him.

When Derrick heard of his disappearance, he felt convinced more than ever that he had abstracted his papers ; but believed he had started with them to India, perhaps to make capital out of Denzil. Some who knew what the solicitor's legal course had been, thought of a dark and speedy end having befallen him ; others surmised that the fear of certain trickeries, or "errors in practice," had caused him suddenly to depart for America ; but all were wide of the truth.

Lord Lamorna knew not what to think, but maintained a dead

and rigid silence as to his ever having had any meeting or transaction with the missing man in any way ; and as many hated, and none regretted Mr. W. S. Sharkley, his existence was speedily forgotten in that district, and it was not until long after that a light was thrown on the mystery that enveloped his disappearance.

Much money, chiefly that of others, had passed through Sharkley's hands in his time, and much of it, as a matter of course, was never accounted for by him ; but he had never before possessed so large a sum at once, and certainly seldom one so easily won, as that presented to him by the titular Lord Lamorna. All the exultation that avarice, covetousness, and successful roguery can inspire glowed in his arid heart, and he walked slowly onward, immersed in thoughts peculiarly his own, as to the mode in which he would invest it, and foresaw how it must and should double, treble, and quadruple itself ere long ; how lands, and houses, messuages and tenements, mills and meadows, should all become his ; and so he wove his golden visions, even as Alnaschar in the Arabian fable wove his over the basket of frail and brittle glass ; and as he proceeded, ever and anon he felt, with a grimace of satisfaction, for the pocket-book containing his beloved cheques.

Some miles of country lay between Rhoscadzhel and Penzance, where he meant to take the railway for his own place. As his penurious spirit had prevented him from hiring a vehicle, he pursued his way on foot ; but he sometimes lost it, darkness having set in, and yet he saw nothing of the lights of the town. He had, in his mental abstraction, walked, or wandered on, he scarcely knew whither, and he only paused from time to time to uplift his clenched hands, to mutter and sigh in angry bitterness of spirit that he had not extracted *more* from Downie Trevelyan, when he had it in his power to put on the screw with vigour, and anon he would ponder as to whether he had not been too precipitate, and whether he had done a wise thing in selling to him the interests of young Denzil, as these might have proved pecuniarily more valuable ; but then poor Denzil was so far away, and from all Sharkley could hear and read in the newspapers, he might never see England more. For the first time in his life, Mr. Sharkley found himself taking an interest in our Indian military affairs.

Some of the deep lanes bordered by those high stone walls peculiar to Cornwall, were left behind, and also many a pretty cottage, in the gardens of which, the fragrant myrtle, the gay fuchsia with its drooping petals, and the hydrangea, flourish all the year round ; and now he was roused by the sound of the sea breaking at a distance round the promontory from which Penzance takes its name—the holy headland of the ancient Cornish

men. From a slight eminence which he was traversing, he could see, but at a distance also, the lights of the town twinkling amid the moorland haze, and that at the harbour head, sending long rays of tremulous radiance far across Mount's Bay ; then, as the pathway dipped down into a furzy hollow, he lost sight of them. He was still within half a mile of the shore, but was traversing a bleak and uneven moorland, and on his right lay a scene of peculiar desolation, encumbered by masses of vast granite rock, here and there tipped by the cold green light of a pale crescent moon, that rose from the wild waste of the vast Atlantic.

Suddenly something like a black hole yawned before him : a gasping, half-stifled cry escaped him ; he stumbled and fell—*where?*

Mechanically and involuntarily, acting more like a machine than a human being, he had in falling grasped something, he knew not what, and clutching at it madly, tenaciously, yea desperately, he clung thereto, swinging he knew not where or how, over space ; but soon the conviction that forced itself upon him, was sufficient to make the hairs of his scalp bristle up, and a perspiration, cold as snow, to start from the pores of his skin.

Old mines may seem somehow to have a certain connection with the story or destiny of Sybil Devereaux, if not of her brother Denzil, and the betrayer of both their interests, who now found himself swinging by the branch of a frail gorse bush, over the mouth of the ancient shaft of an abandoned one—a shaft, the depth of which he knew not, and dared not to contemplate ! He only knew that in Cornwall they were usually the deepest in the known world.

If few persons who are uninitiated, descend the shaft of an ordinary coal-pit, amid all the careful appliances of engineering, without a keen sense of vague danger, what must have been the emotions of the wretch who, with arms perpendicularly above his head, and legs outspread, wildly and vainly seeking to catch some footing, swung pendent over the black profundity that vanished away into the bowels of the earth below, perhaps, for all he knew, nearly a *mile* in depth !

It was beneath him he knew ; the quiet stars were above ; no aid was near ; there was no sound in the air, and none near him, save the dreadful beating of his heart, and a roaring, hissing sound in his ears.

In this awful situation, after his first exclamation of deadly and palsied fear, not a word, not a whisper—only sighs—escaped him. He had never prayed in his life, and knew not how to do so now. The blessed name of God had been often on his cruel lips, in many a matter-of-fact affidavit, and in many an affirmation, made falsely, but never in his heart ; so now, he never thought of God or devil, of heaven nor hell, his only fear was death—extinction !

And there he swung, every respiration a gasping, sobbing sigh, every pulsation a sharp pang ; he had not the power to groan ; as yet his long, lean, bony hands were not weary ; but the branch might rend, the gorse bush uproot, and *then*—

Nevertheless he made wild and desperate efforts to escape the dreadful peril, by writhing his body upward, as his head was only some four feet below the edge of the upper rim or course of crumbling brickwork, which lined the circular shaft, and often he felt his toes scratch the wall, and heard the fragments detached thereby pass whizzing downwards ; but he never heard the ascending sound of the fall below—because below was far, far down indeed !

The silence was dreary—awful : he dared not look beneath, for nothing was to be seen there but the blackness of utter profundity ; he could only gaze upward to where the placid stars that sparkled in the blue dome of heaven, seemed to be winking at him. He dared not cry, lest he should waste his breath and failing strength ; and had he attempted to do so the sound would have died on his parched and quivering lips.

In every pulsation he lived his lifetime over again, and all the secret crimes of that lifetime were, perhaps, being atoned for now.

The widows who, without avail or winning pity, had wept (in that inquisitorial camera de los tormentos, his “office”), for the loss of the hard-won savings of dead husbands, their children’s bread ; wretches from under whose emaciated forms he had dragged the bare pallet, leaving them to die on a bed of cinders, and all in form and process of law ; the strong and brave spirited men, who had lifted up their hard hands and hoarsely cursed him, ere they betook them to the parish union or worse ; the starvelings who had perhaps gained their *suits*, but only in their last coats ; the crimes that some had committed through the poverty and despair he had brought upon them ; the unsuspecting, into whose private and monetary matters he had wormed himself by specious offers of gratuitous assistance and advice—a special legal snare—by the open and too often secret appropriation of valuable papers ; and by the thousand wiles and crooks of policy known only to that curse of society, the low legal practitioner, seemed all to rise before him like a black cloud now ; and out of that cloud, the faces of his pale victims seemed to mock, jibe, and jabber at him.

And there, too, were the handwritings he had imitated, the signatures he had forged, the sham accounts he had fabricated against the wealthy or the needy, the ignorant and the wary alike ; but Sharkley felt no real penitence, for he knew not that he had committed any sin. Had he not always kept the shady side of the law ? and, if rescued, would he not return to his sharp

practice thereof as usual ? Yet he felt, as the moments sped on, a strange agony creeping into his soul :

" So writhes the mind Remorse has riven,
Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven,
Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it death ! "

The bush bending under his weight, hung more perpendicularly now, and thus Sharkley's knees, for the first time, grazed till they were skinned and bloody against the rough brickwork. Was the root yielding ? Oh no, no ; forbid it fate ! He must live—live *—live* ; he was not fit to die—and thus, too ! The cold, salt perspiration, wrung by agony, flowed from the roots of his hair, till it well nigh blinded him, and tears, for even a creature such as he can weep, began to mingle with them. They were perfectly genuine, however, as Master William S. Sharkley wept the probabilities of his own untimely demise.

He had once been on a coroner's inquest. It sat in the principal room of a village inn, upon some human bones—nearly an entire skeleton—found in an old, disused, and partially filled-up pit. He remembered their aspect, so like a few white bleached winter branches, as they lay on a sheet on the dining-table. He could recal the surmises of the jurors. Did the person fall ? Had he, or she—for even sex was doubtful then—been murdered ? or had it been a case of suicide. None might say.

The poor bones of the dead alone could have told, and they were voiceless. All was mystery, and yet the story of some forgotten life, of some unknown crime, or hidden sorrow, lay there; the story that man could never, never know.

This episode had long since been forgotten by Sharkley ; and now, in an instant, it flashed vividly before him, adding poignancy to the keen horrors of his situation. Was such a fate to be his ?

He could distinctly see the upper ledge of bricks, as he looked upward from where, though he had not swung above three minutes, he seemed to have been for an eternity now ; and though he knew not how to pray, he thought that he could spend the remainder of his life happily there, if but permitted to rest his toes upon that narrow ledge, as a place for footing, as now his arms seemed about to be rent from his shoulders. His eyes were closed for a time, and he scarcely dared to breathe—still less to think.

Sharkley was not a dreamer ; he had too little imagination, and had only intense cunning and the instincts that accompany it ; so he had never known what a nightmare is ; yet the few minutes of his present existence seemed to be only such. He had

still sense enough to perceive that the wild and frenzied efforts he made at intervals to writhe his body up, were loosening the root of the gorse bush, and he strove in the dusky light, but strove in vain, to see *how much* he had yet to depend upon; and then he hung quite still and pendant, with a glare in his startling eyeballs, and a sensation as if of palsy in his heart.

His arms were stiffening fast, his fingers were relaxing, and his spine felt as if a sharply pointed knife was traversing it; he knew that the end was nigh—most fearfully nigh—and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, though it was dry as a parched pea.

Oh for one grasp of a human hand ; the sound of any voice ; the sight of a human face ere he passed away for ever !

There was a sudden sound of tearing as the gorse root parted from the soil ; he felt himself slipping through space, the cold air rushed whistling upward, and he vanished, prayerless, breathless, and despairing, from the light of the blessed stars, and then the black mouth of the shaft seemed vacant.

CHAPTER LX.

AT JELLALABAD.

DOWNIE TREVELYAN'S applications to the War Office, the Horse Guards, to the Military Secretary for the Home Department of the East India Company, and even questions asked in his place in the House of Lords, were unremitting for a time, on the affairs of Afghanistan, as he wished to elicit some information concerning the safety of his son, and the probable *non-safety* of Lieutenant Devereaux, more particularly ; but he totally failed in extracting more than vague generalities, or that one was believed to be safe with Sir Robert Sale's garrison in Jellalabad ; and that the other was supposed to be a prisoner of war with many others. How long he might remain so, if surviving, or how long he had remained so, if dead, no one could tell ; but dark rumours had reached Peshawur that the male hostages had been beheaded in the Char Chowk of Cabul, while the females had been sold to the Tartars.

On the assassination of the Shah Sujah, whose ally we had so foolishly become by the mistaken policy of the Earl of Auckland, the prince, his son, had gained possession of the Bala Hissar, the guns and garrison of which gave him for a time full sway over the city of Cabul, when he made the cunning, plotting, and ambitious Ackbar Khan his Vizier.

The latter, however, always on the watch, and by nature suspicious, intercepted a letter written by his young master to General Nott, who commanded our troops in Candahar. This contained some amicable proposals, quite at variance with the inborn hate and rancour which Ackbar bore the English ; and hence a quarrel ensued at the new court.

The prince demanded that the hostages, male and female—the fair Saxon beauty of some of the latter was supposed to have some influence in the request—left by the deceased General Elphinstone, should be delivered up to *him* without question or delay.

Ackbar sternly refused to comply, and it was on this that the young Shah wrote to General Nott, urging him to march at once on Cabul to release the captives ; and, moreover, to free the city from the interference and overweening tyranny of Sirdir, who thereupon resolved to take strong measures, and, with the aid of Amen Oollah Khan, Zohrab Zubberdust, and some others, made his new Sovereign captive. The latter escaped by making a hole in the roof of his prison ; a purse of mohurs, a sharp sword, and a fleet horse, enabled him to reach in safety the cantonments of the British General, to whom he gave a sad detail of the miseries to which the prisoners, especially the delicate ladies, were subjected.

This movement was nearly the means of causing the destruction of all who were left at Ackbar's mercy. All communication between them and the troops in Jellalabad was cut off more strictly and hopelessly than ever ; and Ackbar Khan swore by the Black Stone of Mecca, and by many a solemn and fearful oath, that “the moment he should hear of the approach of British troops again towards Cabul, the hostages should, each and all, man, woman, and child alike, be sold as slaves to the Usbec Tartars ! ” And remember,” he added, with clenched teeth and flashing eyes, to Zohrab the Overbearing, and others who heard him, “that my word is precious to me, even as the *Mohur Solimani*—the seal of Solomon Jared was to him ! ”

This was the signet of the fifth monarch of the world after Adam ; and the holder thereof had, for the time, the entire command of the elements, of all demons, and all created things.

“Now,” he exclaimed, with fierce vehemence, “I cannot violate my oath, for as the sixteenth chapter of the Koran says, ‘*I have made God a witness over me !*’ ”

Hence, perhaps, the rumour that came to Peshawur, and thus any attempt to save or succour them, would, it seemed, but accelerate their ruin, for if once removed to Khoordistan, they should never, never be heard of more, nor could they be traced

among the nomadic tribes who dwell in that vast region of Western Asia, known as the “country of the Khoords.”

The last that, as yet, was known of them, was that they were all in charge of an old Khan, named Saleh Mohammed, and shut up in a fortress three miles from Cabul. There they were kept in horrible suspense as to their future fate ; and to them now were added nine of our officers who had fallen into Ackbar's hands, when, in the month of August, he recaptured the city of Ghuznee.

How many Christian companions in misfortune were with the Ladies Sale and Macnaghten, the garrisons in Jellalabad and Candahar knew not ; neither did they know who, out of the original number taken in the passes, were surviving now those sufferings of mind and body which they all had to undergo. Among them was one poor lady, the widow of an officer, who had the care of eight young children, to add to her mental misery.

The steady and unexpected refusal of Sir Robert Sale to evacuate Jellalabad, completely baulked all the plans of Ackbar Khan, who supplemented his threatening messages by investing the city in person at the head of two thousand five hundred horse and six thousand five hundred juzailchees ; but fortunately Sir Robert had collected provisions for three months, and made a vigorous defence, though the lives or liberties of the hostages, among whom were his own wife and daughter, were held in the balance, and he trusted only to his artillery, the bayonets and the stout hearts of his little garrison, who, in addition to the assaults and missiles of the Afghans, had to contend with earthquakes ; for in one month more than a hundred of those throes of nature shook the city, crumbling beneath their feet the old walls they were defending.

In daily expectation of being relieved, Sale's stout English heart never failed him, for he had learned through our faithful friend, Taj Mohammed, the ex-vizier, that Colonel Wild, with a force, was marching to his aid from one quarter, while General Pollock was crossing the Punjaub from another. Yet a long time, he knew, must elapse before the latter could traverse six hundred miles ; and ere long came the tidings that Wild had totally failed, either by force of arms or dint of bribery, to achieve a march through the now doubly terrible Khyber Pass.

General Nott, however, held out in Candahar, and, on receiving some supplies and reinforcements, he was ready to co-operate with Sale and Pollock in a joint advance upon Cabul, to rescue the hostages at all hazards, or, if *too late* for that, to avenge their fate and the fate of our slaughtered army by a terrible retribution.

A severe defeat sustained by Ackbar Khan, when Sale, on the 7th of August, made a resolute sortie and cut his army to pieces, taking two standards, four of our guns lost at Cabul, all his stores and tents, relieved Jellalabad of his presence ; and in this state were matters while Waller and Audley Trevelyan were serving there, doing any duty on which they might be ordered, foraging, trenching, and skirmishing, for they were unattached to any regiment ; and the former was still ignorant as to the fate of his *fiancée*, the bright-faced and auburn-haired Mabel Trecarrel, and equally so as to that of her sister and his friend Denzil. He had long since reckoned the two latter as with the dead, and mourned for them as such ; for he knew nothing of their being retained as special "loot" by Shereen Khan, who now kept himself aloof from Ackbar, of whom he had conceived a truly Oriental jealousy and mistrust.

Though so near them, Waller knew no more concerning the number, treatment, or the safety of the hostages held for the evacuation of the city he had assisted to defend, than those to whom Downie Trevelyan was applying in London—perhaps less.

To the original number of captives were now added thirty more, from the following circumstance, which in some of its details is curiously illustrative of the cunning and avaricious nature of the Afghan mountaineers. A pretended friendly *cossid*, or messenger, arrived at Jellalabad, bearer of a letter from Captain Souter, of Her Majesty's 44th Regiment, dated from a village near the hill of Gundamuck, detailing the last stand made there by the few unhappy survivors of Elphinstone's army, and adding that he and Major Griffiths, of the 37th Regiment, were the prisoners of a chief who, on a sufficient ransom being paid—a thousand rupees for each—would send them to Jellalabad with their heads on their shoulders. The brave fellows of the 13th Light Infantry instantly subscribed a thousand rupees at the drum-head ; a thousand more were collected with difficulty by their now impoverished officers ; and then came a proposal to ransom twenty-eight privates of the 13th and 44th Regiments, who were in the hands of the same chief, for a *lac* of rupees. By incredible efforts, and by encroachment on the military chest, this sum was sent with certain messengers, who, by a previously concerted scheme, were waylaid and robbed of it by men sent by Ackbar Khan, who, seizing the thirty Europeans, added them to the other hostages whose lives or liberties were to pay for the surrender of Jellalabad !

The poor soldiers had given all they possessed in the world, save their kits and ammunition, to save their comrades from perilous bondage, and had given it in vain. They had but the consolation of having done for the best.

Amid even the exciting bustle of military duty, the reflections of Waller were sometimes intolerable. He could never for a moment forget. Though he was not, as a matter-of-fact young English officer, prone to flights of romantic fancy, imagination would force upon him with poignant horror all that Mabel might be forced to endure at the hands of those on whose mercy she and her companions were cast by a fate that none could have foreseen, especially during the pleasant days of the year that was passed at Cabul, when the race-course, the band-stand, picnics, hunting-parties, morning drives, and rides to see Sinclair's boat upon the lake, tiffin parties at noon, others for whist or music in the evening, made up the round of European social life there, ere Mohammed Ackbar Khan came to the surface again with his deep-laid plots for aggrandisement and revenge.

Mabel Trecarrel, his affianced wife, so gently soft and lady-like—her image was ever before him, her voice ever in his ear, and the varying expressions of her clear grey eyes, with all her winning ways, came keenly and vividly to memory, more especially in the lonely watches of the night, when muffled in his poshteen, with only a Chinsurrah cheroot to soothe his nerves and keep him warm, he trod from post to post visiting his sentinels, or listened for the sounds that might precede an Afghan assault, or perhaps an earthquake; for the troops had both to encounter, though often nothing came but the melancholy howl of the jackal on the night wind, as it sighed over the vast plain around the city of Jellalabad—the Zarang of the historians of Alexander.

He had frequent thoughts of returning to Cabul in disguise as an Afghan. He had already been pretty successful in his Protean attempts to conceal his identity; but Sir Robert Sale would by no means accord him permission to risk his life again in a manner so perilous; so, as partial inactivity was maddening to him, after Ackbar Khan's defeat had left all the avenues from the city open, he volunteered, if furnished with a suitable escort, to ride to Candahar, and urge on General Nott the policy of instantly advancing. Sir Robert Sale agreed to this, and furnished him with a despatch and a guard of twenty Native Cavalry; so Bob Waller departed, actually in high spirits, thankful that even in this small way he was doing something that might ultimately lead to the recapture of Cabul, and, more than all, the rescue of her he loved.

At a quick pace he crossed the arid desert that surrounds the city, and ascended into the well-wooded and magnificent mountain ranges that rise all around it, but more especially to the westward, whither his route lay, and his spirits rose as his party spurred onward. "What pleasure there is in a gallop!" says

Paul Ferroll ; "the object is before one, at which to arrive quickly; the still air becomes a wind marking the swiftness of one's pace—the fleet horse is his own master, yet one's slave; the bodily employment leaves care, thought, and time behind. One feels the pleasure of danger, because there might be danger, and yet there may be none."

So thought Waller, as he careered at the head of his party, with a cigar between his teeth, the which to keep alight while riding at full speed, he had previously dipped in saltpetre, a camp-fashion peculiar to India.

Candahar is distant from Jellalabad two hundred and seventy British miles, and, considering the state of the whole country, the undertaking, at the head of twenty horse, was a brave and arduous one; but Waller confidently set out on his expedition, after having carefully inspected his escort of picked men, and personally examined their arms, ammunition, and saddlery, as he knew not whom they might meet, or have to encounter.

By a curious coincidence, on the very day he bade adieu to his brother officer, Audley Trevelyan, and other friends, to urge and effect a junction of the forces, a fresh and loud burst of indignation against the now-desponding Indian Executive was excited in the minds of Sale's troops by the arrival of a messenger with a startling proposal from the Governor-General, Auckland, to the effect that Jellalabad was *not* a place to retain any longer; that a retreat was to be made from there to Peshawur; that, in effect, the whole of Afghanistan was to be—as Ackbar Khan wished it—abandoned by our forces, and that the helpless women and children, wounded and sick, at Cabul, were to be left at the mercy of irresponsible barbarians until rescued by *quiet* negotiations or a judicious distribution of money; and thus to have peace at any price, leaving our disgraces without remedy, our revenge unaccomplished, and our prestige destroyed—in that quarter of the world at least!

Even the English women who were captives in Afghanistan knew better than this; for, amid the earnest prayers which they put up for their liberation, they ever seemed to know that it was "not to be obtained by negotiation and ransom, *but by hard fighting*," and they had more trust in the bayonets of Sale's Brigade than in all the diplomatists in London or Calcutta.

Fortunately, ere all these disastrous arrangements could be made, a new Governor-General in the person of Lord Ellenborough arrived, and to him Sir Robert Sale despatched Audley Trevelyan with a letter descriptive of his plans, and giving details of his force; and on this mission, with a few attendants, our young staff officer and his companion departed by the way of Peshawur, the gate of Western India, on a long and arduous

journey of nearly five hundred miles, by Rawul Pindee and Umritsur, to Simla, on the slopes of the Himalayas—a journey to be performed by horse and elephant, as the occasion might suit; for the railway to Lahore had not as yet sent up its whistle in the realms of Runjeet Sing.

Meanwhile Waller was proceeding in precisely an opposite direction. Compelled to avoid Ghuznee, which was now in the hands of the Afghans under Ameen Oollah Khan, he and his escort, the half-Kissallah of Native Horse, travelled among the mountains, unnoticed and uncared for by the nomadic dwellers in black tents, whose temporary settlements dotted the green slopes. His sowars all wore turbans in lieu of light-cavalry helmets; and as he too had one, with it, his poshteen, and now weather-beaten visage, he passed as a native chief of some kind; and the route they traversed was sometimes as beautiful as picturesque villages, long shady lanes over-arched by mulberry-trees, orchards of plums, apples, pomegranates, and those great cherries which were introduced by the Emperor Baber, could make it. And so on they rode, by Kurraba and Killaut, till they reached Candahar in safety; and thankful indeed was honest Bob Waller when from the hills, amid the plain, he beheld the city, with its fortress crowning a precipitous rock, its long low walls of sun-dried brick, and the gilded cupola that shrines the tomb of Ahmed Shah, once "the Pearl of his age," the object of many a Dooranee's prayer, and around which so many recluses spend the remainder of their lives in repeating the Koran over and over again without end.

There Waller was welcomed by the gallant General Nott, whom he found full of stern resolution and high in hope for the future, for he was on the very eve of marching with seven thousand well-tried and well-trained troops to the aid of his friend Sale; and on the 15th of August the movement was made, *en route* recapturing Ghuznee. It was stormed, and the Afghans again driven out at the point of the bayonet. The whole place was dismantled; and, among others, Waller had the pleasure of standing where no "unbeliever" ever stood before, in the tomb of the Sultan Mahmud, which is entirely of white marble and sculptured over with Arabic verses from the Koran. Around it, beneath the mighty cupola stand thrones of mother-of-pearl; and upon the slab that covers his grave lies the mace he used in battle, with a head of iron, so heavy that few men now-a-days can use it. The gates of this tomb were miracles of carving and beauty; they were of that hard yellow timber known as sandal-wood, which grows on the coast of Malabar and in the Indian Archipelago, and is highly esteemed for its fragrant perfume and as a material for cabinet work.

Those gates had been brought as trophies from the famous Hindoo temple of Somnath in Goojerat, when sacked by Mahmud in his last expedition during the tenth century; and after hanging on his tomb for eight hundred years, they were now torn down by order of General Nott, and carried off by our victorious troops, for restoration on their original site.

Prior to all this, General Pollock with his army had reached Jellalabad, which he entered under a joyful salute of sixteen pieces of cannon, and then "forward!" was the word heard on all sides, "forward to Cabul!"

Then it was seen how the weather-beaten and hollow faces of our jaded soldiers brightened with joy and ardour, with a flush for vengeance too ; for certain tidings came that, prior to this long-delayed* junction having been effected, the relentless Ackbar, true to his oath, had hurried off all his captives, male and female, in charge of Saleh Mohammed towards the confines of savage Toorkistan—tidings heard by many a husband, father, and lover with despair and rage !



CHAPTER LXI.

THE SCHEME OF ZOHRAB.

TIME, to the young, seems but a slow and cold comforter (alas ! how different it must appear to the old) ; so Denzil knew that, though sluggish, time must eventually bring about some change in the captivity he was enduring in the hands of Shireen Khan —a mode of life that, but for the sweet companionship of Rose, would have been simply so intolerable that he should certainly have attempted to escape even at the risk of death.

In perfect ignorance of all that was passing in the outer world of far-away Europe, of India, and even Afghanistan, they and the other hostages, from whom they were, happily for themselves, kept apart, knew nothing of all that was passing elsewhere or of the plans that were forming and the hopes that grew for their rescue or release.

We say, happily they were sequestered from those who were in the hands of Ackbar Khan : thus they were not harassed by dreadful and incessant doubts of their future fate, especially the

* It was with something of waggerly, perhaps, that the band of the 13th Light Infantry, on this occasion, welcomed Pollock, by playing the old Scottish melody,

" Oh, but you've been lang o' comin',
Lang, lang, lang o'comin'."

vague and terrible one of transmission to Toorkistan ; for the old Kussilbash lord treated them kindly, and, to the best of his resources, hospitably, confidently believing that it was his personal interest to do so, as the gaily embroidered regimental colour of the 44th, or East Essex, in which Denzil purposely aired his figure occasionally in the garden of the fort, still impressed him with the idea that he had secured a great Feringhee Nawab whom the Queen or Company might ransom, or who might prove a powerful friend to him if reverses came upon Cabul, and *not* a poor Ensign, or Lieutenant, as Denzil was now ; though he knew not that, consequent to slaughter, death by disease, and so forth, he had now been promoted in the corps.

Chess-playing was the great bond between old Shireen and the bright laughing Rose, whom he treated with infinitely more care and tenderness than either of his own daughters ; but to Denzil he would frequently say in his hoarse, guttural, and most unmusical language, between the whiffs of his silk-bound and silver-cupped bubble-bubble—

“ I am thy friend ; yet remember that friendship with unbelievers is forbidden by the Koran, especially with Jews or Christians ; for saith the fifth chapter, ‘ Are they not friends one with another ? and they will corrupt us, their alms being like the icy winds which blow on the fields of the perverse, and blast their corn in the ear.’ ”

Denzil could not repress an impatient grimace under a smile, for it was the Koran—always and ever the Koran—among these Afghans ; every casual remark or idea suggested a quotation from or a reference to it, so that the Khanum could not dye her nails, adjust her veil, put pepper in the kabobs, or chillis among the pillau of rice, without a reference to something that was said or done on a similar occasion by the Holy Camel-driver of Mecca, —their whole conversation being interlarded with pious sayings, like that of the Scottish Covenanters or English Puritans of old.

Isolated as they were in that lonely Afghan fort, surrounded by towering green hills, the interest that Denzil and Rose had in each other grew daily and hourly deeper ; so that at last she learned to love him—yes, actually to love him—as fondly as he had ever loved her, and to feel little emotions of pique and jealousy when he strove to address the daughters of the house and teach them a very strange kind of broken English.

Propinquity and a just appreciation of his sterling character achieved this for him, and he felt supremely happy in the conviction of this returned love, though the end of it yet was difficult to foresee.

But it was such a divine happiness to dream softly on for the

present, shut in there as they were alone for themselves apparently, and, as it seemed, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." Denzil's doubts of her were gone now; yet Rose had the power to conceal for a long time the gradual change in her own sentiments and secret thoughts from him who had inspired them; for the coquette was loth to admit that she had succumbed at last.

Denzil had contrived, after innumerable essays, in the most remarkable species of polyglot language, to make old Shireen comprehend that they had not, as yet, been married before a Cadi (or Mollah, as the Christians are), and had to wait the permission of others. On this he stroked his vast beard in token of assent, and thrice muttered "Shabash!" with great solemnity, meaning, "Well-done—agreed."

Rose had lost much of her heedlessness of manner now; her latest flirtation, which had been with Audley Trevelyan, was utterly forgotten, as many others had been; and the quaint Afghan dress she was compelled by the exigencies of her scanty wardrobe to wear—to wit, a yellow chemise of silk embroidered with black, trousers of fine white muslin, which revealed through its thin texture the roundness of each tapered ankle, with her veil floating loose, in token of her being unmarried, did not afford her much room for coquetry, although it afforded scope for her old waggery, and her long unbound auburn tresses that spread over her shoulders in brilliant ripples, she was wont to ridicule as a *coiffure à la sauvage*, though one with which Denzil's fingers—when unobserved by the Afghan household, he and she could ramble among the parterres, rosaries, and shrubberies of the Khan's garden—were never weary of toying.

"You will tire of this life, as I do, and more soon of waiting too," said she one day.

"I shall wait and be faithful to you, Rose, even as I was taught at school Jacob was to Rachel," he replied, fondly caressing her hands in his.

"Oh! that is much more solemn than Paul and Virginia," said she laughing; "but, for heaven's sake, don't imitate our dingy friends here in pious quotations."

When Rose Trecarrel calmly learned to know herself, she found upon consideration, and came to the conclusion, that it was not mere admiration for Denzil's handsome person and earnest winning manner; it was not gratitude for his steady faith to herself, it was not the charm of propinquity, nor the emotion of self-flattery at his passion,—that it was not any of these singly, but all put together, that made her love him so dearly now, and wonder at her heedless blindness in the time that was past.

Save Zohrab Zubberdust, that handsome, reckless, and wander-

ing Mohammedan soldier of fortune, no visitor at this time came to the fort ; and he was openly permitted to see Rose with the other ladies of the family, and occasionally to converse and smoke a cherry-stick pipe with Denzil, who deemed it rash on the part of Shireen to permit them—Rose and himself—to be seen so freely by one who was a paid follower of Ackbar Khan; but the leader of five thousand mounted Kussilbash spearmen doubtless felt himself pretty independent in action now. Moreover, since Ackbar's signal defeat before the walls of Jellalabad, his influence had been lessening in Cabul and all the surrounding country ; and Zohrab, like many other "khans," who had only their swords and pistols, and, like many other Afghan *snobs*, that title to maintain, was beginning to wax cool in his service, even as the funds ebbed in his treasury ; for Ackbar now had but one hope of replenishing these—the ransom or sale of the captives left in his hands, and each head of these he reckoned at so many mohurs of gold.

It was from some casual remarks of Zohrab that Rose and Denzil first learned, with mingled emotions of satisfaction and fear, compassion and hope, that so many more hostages, male and female, were in the hands of Ackbar, and that their own hopes of rescue or ransom were thereby increased.

Rose, through the medium of the Khan and of Denzil, overwhelmed Zubberdust with questions as to *who* these prisoners were. Was her father among them ? No description he gave her answered to that of the burly, bronzed, and grizzle-haired "Sirdir Trecarrel ;" but there was *one* "mem sahib," whose appearance tallied so closely in stature, face, eyes, and colour of hair with her own, that knowing as she did all the ladies who had been in the cantonments, Rose could not doubt but that she was Mabel—Mabel, her dear and only sister, who must have been within a few miles of her all those weary anxious months, and yet neither could know of the other's existence ; for Mabel, like all who were with Elphinstone's ill-fated host, had now learned to number all who had loved her with the dead.

Now it happened that Zohrab Zubberdust had frequently seen Mabel Trecarrel among the hostages, and been struck by her beauty. Indeed, Ackbar Khan, who cared not for such personal attributes as she possessed, and was long since past all soft emotions now, or, indeed, any save those of ferocity, ambition, and avarice, had frequently indicated her to Ameen Oollah Khan and others as the one upon whom he put most value, and for whom he expected the largest sum from a certain Toorkoman chief whom he named, and who was in the habit of purchasing or exchanging horses for such pleasant commodities ; for at that precise time, or in that year of Queen Victoria's reign, Mohammed

Ackbar could scarcely realise as a probability the fact that the year 1871 would see a descendant of the Great Mogul—he who was lord of Persia, Transoxana, and Hindostan—one of the royal race of Delhi, sentenced in a Feringhee court of law, by a cadi in a tow wig, to four years' imprisonment with hard labour “for burying a slave girl” in the city of Benares ! So,

“ Manners with fortunes, humours turn with climes,
Tenets with books, and principles with times !”

Thus Zohrab, perceiving that the power and influence of Ackbar had been daily growing less in Cabul, especially since the flight of the young Shah to the British General, had begun to dream of possessing himself of this rare European beauty, and departing with her, his horse and lance, in search of “fresh fields and pastures new,” and, if possible, of another paymaster; perchance to the court of the Emir of Bokhara, the Shah of Persia, or some one else, alike beyond the ken of Ackbar and the influence of the Feringhees and their queen. In this intention Zohrab felt the less compunction, that Ackbar had of late permitted his pay to be in arrears several *tillas* of gold.

But how to get her quietly out of his power, still more how to get her out of the immediate care and wardship of such a wary old soldier and chief as Saleh Mohammed, to whom the especial keeping of the hostages had been confided by the Sirdir, were the two principal difficulties of Zohrab.

He hoped to achieve much through the real or supposed relationship to Rose, with whom he conversed freely, at times, on this and other subjects (Denzil acting as their interpreter), and from him she gradually learned much of which Shireen and his household had, perhaps, kept her in ignorance—the state of affairs before Jellalabad and in the passes.

“ Are not the poor dead creatures buried there ? ” Rose once asked, while many a face and voice came back to memory.

“ Buried ? a few—but not deep,” replied Zohrab, evasively.

“ How—what mean you ? ”

“ Because, as I rode through the pass but yesterday, my horse’s hoofs turned up great pieces of human flesh, while the jackals and hyenas have been busy with the rest ; they are dry bones now.”

Rose tremulously clasped her white hands and shuddered.

“ And those bones,” was the sententious remark of Shireen, who was listening, “ not even the voice of Ezekiel could, as we are told it once did, call back to life, as it called the dead Israelites of old.”

“ A fortunate thing for us, Khan,” said the irreverent Zohrab, laughingly.

"Why?"

"I mean, if the result was to be the same; for all arose and lived for years after; and is it not written that they moved among living men with a stench and colour of corpses, and had to wear garments blackened with pitch?"

"That weary Koran again!" murmured Rose; while the Khan frowned, and, to change the subject, said,

"Tell us, Zohrab, more about the Feringhee damsel whom this lady deems must be her sister, and your plans regarding her."

"I fear she could not be prevailed upon to trust herself to me under any pretext, or to leave the companionship of her friends in misfortune without some assurance that she who is with you, Khan Shireen, is indeed her sister in blood."

"Most true," said Shireen, running his brown fingers through his dense beard with an air of perplexity.

"Oh, that may be easily arranged," said Denzil, full of hope at the prospect of seeing Mabel, of the joy it would afford Rose, and the wish to learn from her own lips all that had happened to so many dear friends since that terrible day when so many thousands perished, and so many were separated never to meet more. Thus, he suggested that Rose should entrust Zohrab with a note to be delivered, on the first convenient opportunity, to Mabel, or the lady who was supposed to be she. Zohrab did not care about her identity the value of a cowrie-shell, provided his own plans succeeded.

"And you shall bring her here without delay?" said Shireen, while he knit his bushy and impending eyebrows.

"Where else would she be safe, Khan?"

"Not with you, at all events," was the dubious response.

Zohrab coloured perceptibly, and a covert gleam flashed in his glossy black eyes, as he said,

"My head may answer for this project, Khan, if I am taken."

"Taken—how? Do you mean to fly?" asked Shireen, with another keen glance.

"Nay—nay; not if I can help it," stammered Zohrab, who saw that the Khan's sunken eyes were full of strange light.

"If it becomes known that she is here, the fact will embroil me with Ackbar; but, bah! what matter is it?" said Shireen, proudly. "The city is divided against him, and he knows I can bring five thousand red caps into the field; and she will be one more prisoner for Shireen of the Kussilbashes!" he muttered under his beard. "Go then, Zohrab; go and prosper."

"May I not accompany him?" asked Denzil eagerly, as for months he had never been beyond the wall and ditch of the fort, and he longed to make a reconnaissance with a future eye to escape.

"Nay," said Zohrab, "you know not what you propose, Sahib. Your presence would but encumber me, and add to the lady's peril : it is not to be thought of."

Rose added her entreaties that he would not think of it either ; for she might lose her lover, and not regain her sister, so suddenly, so recently heard of ; and then an emphatic and brief command from the Khan ended the matter, so far as poor Denzil was concerned, and he felt himself compelled to succumb.

Writing materials, such as the Afghans use, the strong fibrous paper, a reed split for a pen, with deep black and perfumed Indian ink, were soon brought ; and Rose, with a prayerful emotion in her fluttering heart, and a hand that more than once almost failed in its office, so great was her excitement, wrote a single line assuring Mabel that she, herself, was safe, and to "confide in the bearer of *this*, who would bring her to where she was residing ;" and with this tiny missive—which he placed to his lips and then to his forehead in token of faith, while his black eyes flashed with an expression which Rose saw, but failed to analyse—safely deposited in the folds of his turban, Zohrab took his departure ; and with a heartfelt invocation for his success on her lips, Rose heard the sound of the hoofs of his swift Tartar horse die away on the road that led towards the dark rocky hills of Siah Sung.

"Shabash ! such children of burnt fathers those Feringhees are !" said Zohrab, laughing as he galloped along. "Well, well, let me enjoy the world ere I become the prey of the world !"

Zohrab had promised to return with the lady, or, if without her, to bring some sure tidings, not later than the evening of the second day ; but the evening sun of the third had reddened and died out on the mountain peaks, the third, the fourth, the fifth, and a whole week passed away, yet there came no word or sign from Zohrab, and never more did he cross the threshold of Shireen's dwelling !

Had he been discovered and slain by Saleh Mohammed, or what had happened ?

Rose wept, for the tender hope, so suddenly lighted in her impulsive heart, only to be as suddenly extinguished ; but as yet no suspicion of treachery on the part of Zohrab Zubberdust had entered the minds of her or Denzil, whatever Shireen Khan, as an Afghan naturally prone to suspicion, may have thought.

CHAPTER LXII.

MABEL DELUSED.

ON receiving the note from Rose Trecarrel, the cunning Zohrab, full of his own nefarious plans, had ridden straight from the white-walled fort of Shireen Khan to that commanded by Saleh Mohammed, which is situated exactly three miles from Cabul, amid a well-cultivated country ; and there, knowing well the time when, after hearing morning prayers read according to the service of the Church of England by one lady who had preserved her "Book of Common Prayer," the poor captives, with the children who were among them, were wont to take an airing in the garden, he chose the occasion ; for, as he was aware, Saleh Mohammed, kneeling upon a piece of black xummul, under the shadow of a great cypress, would be also at *his* orisons, and telling over his string of ninety-nine sandal-wood beads, with his face bowed towards the *west*, as is the custom in India and Persia. The precept of the Koran is, that when men pray they shall turn towards the Kaaba, or holy house of Mecca ; and, consequently, throughout the whole Moslem world, indicators are put up to enable the faithful to fulfil this stringent injunction. So selecting, we say, a time when the grim old commandant of the fort was deep in his orisons, with his head bowed, and his silver beard floating over the weapons with which his Cashmere girdle bristled—for the modern Afghan (like the Scottish Highlander of old) is never found unarmed, even by his own fireside—he made a sign to Mabel that he wished to speak with her ; but he had to repeat this salaam more than once ere she understood him, as she was intently toying with and caressing a little boy, whose parents had perished in the late disasters, and who clung specially to her alone.

Mabel, pale and colourless now more than was her wont, though she never had possessed a complexion so brilliant as her sister Rose, bowed to Zohrab, whom she little more than knew by sight, and by the force of local custom was lowering her veil (for she, too, like all the rest, now wore the Afghan female dress) and turning away, when Zohrab placed a hand on his lips, and, making a motion indicative of entreaty, silence, and haste, held up the tiny note of Rose.

On this Mabel's pale cheek flushed ; she hesitated, and many ideas shot swiftly through her mind, while she glanced hastily about her, to see who observed them. Was this note some plot for her release and the release of her friends—some political or military stratagem ? Had it tidings of her father's burial—for she knew that he had fallen in the Pass—of the army, of those who were in Jellalabad ? Was it a love-letter ? Zohrab Zubber-

dust was certainly very handsome ; her woman's eye admitted that. This idea occurred last of all ; yet the note might be from Waller—dear Bob Waller, with his fair honest face and ample whiskers. All these thoughts passed like lightning through her mind as she took the missive, which was written on a small piece of paper, folded triangularly and without an address.

Then, as she opened it, a half-stifled cry of mingled astonishment and rapture escaped her.

"Rose, it is from Rose ; she yet lives ! Oh, my God, I thank Thee ! I thank Thee !—she yet lives, but where ?" she exclaimed, in a voice rendered low by excess of emotion, as she burst into tears, and read again and again the few words her sister had written.

Zohrab was attentively observing her. He saw how pure and beautiful she was ; how unlike aught that he had ever looked upon before—even the fairest, softest, and most languishing maids of Iraun ; for Mabel was an English girl, above the middle height, and fully rounded in all her proportions. All that he had heard of houris, of those black-eyed girls of paradise, the special care of the Angel Zamiyad, seemed to be embodied in her who was before him. Her quiet eyes seemed wondrously soft, clear, and pleading in expression, to one accustomed ever to the black, beady orbs of the Orientals ; and as he gazed, he felt bewildered, bewitched by the idea that in a little time, if he was wary, all this fair beauty might be his—his as completely as his horse and sabre !

"My sister ! my dear, dear sister !" exclaimed Mabel, impulsively, kissing the note and pressing it to her breast. "Oh, I must tell of this. Lady Sale, Lady Sale !" she exclaimed, looking around her ; but Zohrab laid a hand on her arm, and a finger on his lip significantly.

"Lady Sahib," said he, in a low guttural voice, "you will go with me ?"

"Yes, yes—oh yes ; but how ? to where ?—and I must confer with my friends and the Khan, Saleh Mohammed."

"Nay ; to do so would ruin all."

"With my friends, surely ?"

"Nay ; that too would be unwise : to none."

"None ?"

"I repeat, none," said Zohrab, whose habit of mind, like that of all Orientals, was inclined to suspicion, secrecy, and mistrust.

"Why ?" asked Mabel.

"Does not your letter tell you ?"

"No—but can I—ought I to—to—" she paused and glanced irresolutely towards the group of her companions in misfortune,

who were generally clustered round the chief matrons of their party, Lady Sale and the widowed Lady Macnaghten ; and the idea flashed upon her mind that she might be unwise to leave the shelter of their presence and society, and trust herself to this Afghan warrior. But, then, had not Rose bade her confide in him ?

“ Where is my sister, and with whom ? ” she asked.

“ I can only tell you that she is in perfect safety,” replied Zubberdust, unwilling in that locality to compromise himself by mentioning the name of Shireen Khan.

“ I shall be silent, and go with you,” said Mabel, making an effort to master her deep and varied emotions.

“ When ? ”

“ Now—this instant, if you choose.”

“ That is impossible. At dusk, when the sun is set, I shall be here again on this spot, and take you to her. Till then, be silent, and confide in *none* : to talk may ruin all ! ” said Zubberdust, whose active mind had already conceived a plan for out-witting Saleh Mohammed and his guard of Dooranees, who watched the walls of the fort from the four round towers which terminated each angle, and on each of which was mounted a nine-pounder gun taken from our old cantonments.

Too wary to remain needlessly in her company, with all her allurements, now that his pretended mission was partly performed, and thereby draw the eyes of the observant or suspicious upon them, and more particularly upon himself, he at once withdrew, leaving poor Mabel, who naturally was intensely anxious to question him further, overwhelmed by emotions which she longed eagerly to share by confidence with her friends ; for news of any European, especially of one who belonged to the little circle of English society at Cabul, must prove dear and of deepest interest to them all. Yet had not this mysterious messenger impressed upon her, that if she was to see her sister, to rejoin her, and hear the story of her wonderful disappearance at the mouth of the Khyber Pass, if she would soothe, console, it might be protect her, she must be silent ?

Slowly passed the day in the fort of Saleh Mohammed. The tall and leafy poplars, the slender white minars, the four towers of the fort, which was a perfect parallelogram, and the wooded and rocky hills that overlooked them all, cast their shadows across the plain (through which the Cabul winds towards the Indus) gradually in a circle, and then, when stretching far due westward, they gradually faded away ; the snow-capped peaks of the Hindu-Kush, the mighty Indian Caucasus, rose cold and pale against the clear blue sky, where the stars were twinkling out in succession ; and with a nervous anxiety, which she found

it almost impossible to control, Mabel Trecarrel stole away, with mingled emotions, from the apartments assigned to the lady hostages—emotions of sorrow, half of shame for her silence concerning the project she had in hand, and her enforced reticence to those who loved her, and had ever been so kind to her amid their own heavy afflictions—compunction for the honest alarm her absence would certainly occasion them on the morrow; but hope and joy in the anticipated reunion with her sister soon swept all such minor thoughts away, and she longed and thirsted for the embrace and companionship of Rose, to whom, though the difference in their years was but small, she had ever been a species of mother and monitress—never so much as when in their happy English home in Cornwall, far away!

Since their strange separation on that fatal morning, when their poor father, in his despair and sorrow, galloped rearward to perish in the skirmish, how much must the pretty, the once-playful, and coquettish Rose have to tell; and how much had she, herself, to impart in return!

Her heart beat almost painfully, when, on approaching the appointed spot for the last time, she saw the figure of Zohrab Zubberdust standing quite motionless under the shadow of the great cypress, where in the morning Saleh Mohammed had knelt at prayer. He wore his steel cap (with its neck-flap of mail), on which the starlight glinted; he had a small round gilded shield slung on his back by a leather belt; his posheeten was buttoned up close to his throat, and he was, as usual, fully armed; but in one hand he carried a large, loose chogah, or man's cloak, of dull-coloured red cloth; and now Mabel felt that the decisive moment had, indeed, all but arrived: beyond that, her ideas were vague in the extreme, and her breathing became but a series of hurried and thick respirations.

"Is all safe? is all ready—prepared?" she asked, in a broken voice.

"Inshallah—all," replied the taciturn Mahomedan, who, like all of his race and religion, had few words to spare.

The idea of escaping by ladders of rope or wood had never seemed to him as possible. The walls of the fort were twenty-five feet high, and surrounded by a deep wet ditch, the water of which came by a canal, through a rice-field, from the Cabul river. Its only gate was guarded by a party of Saleh Mohammed's men, under a Naick (or subaltern), with whom Zohrab was very intimate; and beyond or outside these barriers he had left his horse haltered (in sight of the sentinels), and so that it could not stir from the place, as the only portion of the gate which the Naick was permitted to open was the *kikree*, or wicket, through which but one at a time could pass.

Zohrab Zubberdust, scarcely daring to trust himself to look on Mabel's fair, anxious, and imploring face, lest it might bewilder him from his fixed purpose, took from his steel cap the white turban cloth he wore twisted round it, and, speedily forming it into a single turban with a falling end, placed it on her head. He enveloped her in the ample chogah, hiding half her face, gave her his sabre to place under her arm, and the simple disguise was complete ; for, in the dusk now, none could perceive that she wore slippers in lieu of the brown leather jorabs or ankle-boots of the Afghans ; and looking every inch a taller and perhaps a manlier Osmanlie than himself, Mabel walked leisurely by his side towards the gate, where, as watch-words, parole, and countersign were alike unknown to the guard, fortunately none were required of them ; but her emotions almost stifled her, when she saw the black, keen, and glossy eyes of the Dooranees surveying her, as they leaned leisurely on their long juzails, which were furnished with socket bayonets nearly a yard in length.

She moved mechanically, like one in a dream, and the circumstance of striking her head as she failed to stoop low enough in passing through the wicket added to her confusion ; nor was she quite aware that they had been permitted to pass free and unquestioned, as two men, by the Naick, to whom Zohrab made some jesting remark about the "awkwardness of his friend," until she saw behind her the lofty white walls of the fort gleaming in the pale starlight, their loopholes and outline reflected downward in the slimy wet ditch where water-lilies were floating in profusion.

Unhaltering his horse and mounting, her new companion desired her, with more impressiveness than tenderness of tone—for the former was his habit, and the moment was a perilous and exciting one—to walk on by his side a little way, as if they were conversing, and thereby to lull any suspicion in the minds of such Dooranees as might be observing them ; for they were still within an unpleasant distance of the long rifles of those who were posted on the towers of the fort ; and still more were they within range of those ginjauls which are still used in India, and are precisely similar to the swivel wall-pieces invented long ago by Marshal Vauban, and throw a pound ball to a vast distance.

On descending the other side of an intervening eminence, that was covered by wild sugar-canies and aromatic shrubs, the leaves of which were tossing in the evening breeze, he curiously desired her to place her right foot upon his left within the stirrup-iron, and then, with the aid of his hand, he readily placed her on the holsters of the saddle before him. He now applied the spurs with vigour to his strong, active, and long-bodied Tartar horse,

and, with a speed which its double burden certainly served to diminish, it began quickly to leave behind the dreaded fort of Mohammed Saleh.

As the latter began to sink and lessen in the distance, Mabel Trecarrel felt as if there was a strange and dreamy unreality about all this episode. Many an officer and Indian Sowar had ridden into the Khoord Cabul Pass with his wife or his children before him, even as she was now borne by Zohrab; she had heard and seen many wild and terrible things since her father, with other officers of the Company's service, had come, in an evil hour, "up country," to command Shah Sujah's Native Contingent; she had read and heard of many such adventures, escapes, flights, and abductions in romance and reality; but what might be her fate now, if this should prove to be the latter—an *abduction* of herself—some trick of which she had permitted herself to become the too-ready victim?

She was in a land where the people were prone to wild and predatory habits, and, moreover, were masters in trickery, cunning, and cruelty. Had she been deceived? she asked of herself, when she felt the strong, sinewy, and bony arm of Zohrab tightening round her waist, while his wiry little horse, with its fierce nose and muscular neck outstretched, and its dancing mane streaming behind like a tiny smoke-wreath, sped on and on, she knew not whither!

Had she been deceived, was the ever-recurring dread, when the handwriting was that of Rose, beyond all doubt? But written *when*? or had Rose been deluded? Was this horseman the person in whom she had been desired "to confide," or had he stolen the note from another?—perhaps, after killing him! Those Afghans were such subtle tricksters that she felt her mistrust equalled only by her loathing of them all.

Mabel asked herself all these tormenting questions when, perhaps, too late; and she knew that, whether armed or unarmed, Heaven had never intended her to be a heroine, or to play the part of one: she felt a conviction that she was merely "an every-day young lady," and that if "much more of this kind of thing went, she must die of fright."

Just as she came to this conclusion an involuntary cry escaped her. The boom of a cannon—one of Her Majesty's nine-pounders, of which the Khan had possessed himself—pealed out on the calm still atmosphere of the Indian evening, now deepening into night. Another and another followed, waking the echoes of the woods and hills; and, though distant now, each red flash momentarily lit up the sky. They came from the fort of Saleh Mohammed to alarm the country; and still further to effect this and announce the escape of a prisoner, a vast quantity

of those wonderful and beautiful crimson, blue, green, and golden lights, in the manufacture of which all Oriental pyrotechnists excel so particularly, were shot off in every direction from the walls, showering upward and downward like falling stars, describing brilliant arcs through the cloudless sky; and with an exclamation on his bearded mouth, expressive of mockery and malison with fierce exultation mingled, Zohrab Zubberdust looked back for a moment, while his black eyes flashed fire in the reflected light.

"Hah!" he muttered, "dog of a Dooranee, may the grave of the slave that bore thee be defiled!"

And while one hand tightened around his prize, with the other he urged his horse to greater speed than ever.

CHAPTER LXIII.

BY THE HILLS OF BEYMARU.

As they proceeded, past groves of drooping willows, past rows of leafy poplars, rice-fields where pools of water glittered in the starlight, and past where clumps of the flowering oleaster filled the air with delicious perfume, Mabel began to recognise the features of the landscape, and knew by the familiar locality that she was once more within a very short distance of Cabul. Again, in the light of the rising moon, as she sailed, white and silvery, above the black-jagged crests of the Siah Sung, Mabel Trecarrel could recognise the burned and devastated cantonments, where in flame and ruin the fragile bungalows, the compounds of once-trim hedge-rows, and all, had passed away,—the bare boundary walls and angular bastions alone remained. She saw the site of her father's pretty villa, a place of so many pleasant and happy memories—the daily lounge of all the young officers of the garrison; and there, too, were the remains of the Residency, where Sir William Macnaghten, as the Queen's representative, dispensed hospitality to all. Yonder were the hills and village of Beymaru; and further off a few red lights that twinkled high in air announced the Bala Hissar, the present residence of Ackbar Khan; but to take her in *that* direction formed then no part of the plans of Zohrab Zubberdust.

He rode straight towards a lonely place which lay between the Beymaru Hills and the Lake of Istaliff; and as the locality grew more and more sequestered he slackened the speed of his horse, now weary and foam-flaked. After a time he drew up, and, requesting her to alight, lifted her to the ground, and politely and gently urged her to rest herself for a little space.

"My sister?" said Mabel, tremulously.

"Is not here," replied he.

"But where, then?"

"Patience yet awhile," said he with a smile, which she could not perceive; while he, to be prepared for any emergency, proceeded at once to shift his saddle, rub down his horse with a handful of dry grass, give it a mouthful or two from a certain kind of cake which he carried in his girdle; and then he looked to his bridle, stirrup-leather, and the charges of his pistols. Accustomed to arms and strife of late, Mabel looked quietly on, taking all the preparations for uncertain contingencies as mere matters of course.

Breathless and weary with her strange mode of progression, she had seated herself on a stone close by; and while the careful rider was grooming his steed and making him drink a little of the shining waters of the long narrow lake, she looked anxiously around her, surmising when or in what manner of habitation she should find her sister. Not a house or homestead, not even the black tent of a mountain shepherd, was in sight. On all sides the lonely green and silent hills towered up in the quiet moonlight, and the still, calm lake reflected their undulating outlines downward in its starry depth.

The holly-oak, the wild almond, and the khinjuck tree, which distils myrrh, and in that warlike land of cuts and slashes is in great repute for healing sabre wounds, the homely dog-rose, the sweet-briar, the juniper bush, and the wild geranium, all grew among the clefts of the rocks in luxuriant masses; while sheets of wild tulips waved their gorgeous cups among the green sedges by the lake.

Not far from where she sat was a grove, which she remembered to have been the scene of a once-happy picnic party, of which Bob Waller was one. She recognised the place now. She knew it was a lonely solitude, that in summer was ever full of the perfume of dewy branches, fresh leaves, and opening flowers; but the immediate spot where they had halted had been anciently used as a burying-ground. A portion of an old temple, covered by luxuriant creepers, lay there, and two magnificent cypresses still towered skyward amid the half-flattened mounds and sinking grave-stones of the long-forgotten dead. The remains of a little musjid, or place for prayer, long since ruined by some savage and idolatrous Khonds, who came down from the hills, lay there among the débris, which included a shattered well, built by some pious Moslem of old. The water from it gurgled past her feet towards the lake, and she remembered how Waller had placed the bottles of champagne and red Cabul wine in the runnel to cool them.

And now, as if contrasting the joyous past with the bitter present, a shudder came over Mabel. She held out her pale hand, which looked like ivory in the moonlight, and said to Zohrab, as he approached her—

“It is a gloomy place, this. Is my sister far from here?”

“About five coss,” said he, confidently; and he spoke the truth, and charmed by seeing her out-stretched hand, an action which betokened reliance or trust—he flattered himself, perhaps, regard—he took a seat by her side, and then Mabel began to view him with positive distrust and uneasiness. She said—

“Five coss—ten miles yet! Let us go at once, then!”

“Stay,” said he, “let us rest a little. You are—nay, must be weary;” and arresting her attempt to rise with a hand upon her arm, he drew nearer her; and sooth to say, though he was confident in bearing, bravely embroidered in apparel, and had a handsome exterior. Zohrab Zubberdust was but an indifferent love-maker, and knew not how to go about it, with a “Feringhee mem sahib” least of all. He was puzzled, and made a pause, during which Mabel’s large, clear, grey eyes regarded him curiously, warily, and half sternly.

As the mistress of her father’s late extensive household, with its great retinue of native servants (each of whom had half a dozen others to perform his or her work), and as such, coming hourly in contact with the dealers and others in the bazaars and elsewhere, Mabel Trecarrel had, of necessity, picked up a knowledge of the Hindostanee and the Afghan, far beyond her heedless sister Rose, who, as these were neither the languages of flirtation or the flowers, scarcely made any attempt to do so; hence Mabel could converse with Zohrab with considerable fluency.

Her beauty was as soft and as bright as that of Rose, but it was less girlish and of a much higher and more statuesque character; so “Zohrab the Overbearing” now felt himself rather at a loss to account for the emotion of awe—we have no other name for it—with which she inspired him. The point, the time, and the place when he should have her all to himself had arrived, true to all his calculations and beyond his hopes; and yet his tongue and spirit failed him, as if a spell were upon him.

In his lawless roving life, now serving the Khan of Khiva, on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, now the Emir of Bokhara, far away beyond the waters of the Oxus, and lastly Ackbar Khan, he had, in predatory war, carried off many a girl with all her wealth of bracelets and bangles, the spoil of his spear and sabre, trussing her up behind him like the fodder or oats for his Tartar nag; but never had he felt before as he did now, for, unlike the maids of the desert, the Feringhee failed to accept the situation.

He felt perplexed—secretly enraged, and yet he murmured half to himself and half to her, as his dark face and darker gleaming eyes drew nearer hers—

“The whiteness of her bosom surpasses the egg of the ostrich or the leaf of the lily, and her breath is sweet as the roses of Irem—yea, as those of Zulistan ! Listen to me,” he added abruptly, in a louder and sharper tone, and in his figurative language ; “fair daughter of love, give ear. You have won my heart, my love, my soul, subduing me—even Zohrab ! Learn in turn to be subdued, submissive, and obedient. Happy is he who shall call you wife ; and that happy man—is Zohrab !”

The intense bewilderment of poor Mabel increased to extreme fear at those words, so absurdly inflated, yet so blunt in import, and she shrunk back, but could not turn from the dark glittering eyes that gleamed with a serpent-like fascination into hers.

So she *had* been deluded after all, and her worst anticipations were about to be realised at last ! Zohrab grasped her left hand with his right, and planting his left cheek on the other hand, with an elbow on his knee, began to take courage, and, surveying her steadily, to speak more distinctly and with an admiring smile ; for the silence of the night was around them, and no sound came on the wind that moaned past the grove or the great cypresses close by ; so from the silence, perhaps, he gathered confidence, if, indeed, he really required it.

“Allah has been good to us,” said he, “exceedingly good, in creating such beautiful beings as women to please us. You are more beautiful than any I have seen—too much so to be left to gladden a Kaffir’s heart ; so you shall remain with me, and be the light of my eyes.”

“Wretch !—fool that I have been ! Rose, Rose !” gasped Mabel, scarcely knowing what she said.

“I love you,” he resumed softly, while his hot clasp tightened on her hand, and his lips approached her ear ; “you hear—and understand me ?”

“*You* love me !” exclaimed Mabel, rashly, with proud scorn in her tone, despite the deadly fear that gathered in her heart, and while her eyes flashed with an expression to which the Oriental was quite unaccustomed in a captive woman.

“Yes, I love you—I, Zohrab,” was the somewhat egotistical response.

“You know not what love is ; but, even if you did, you shall not dare to talk of it to me. That you may have a fancy, I can quite well understand ; but a fancy, or a passion, and love are very different things. What do you, or what can you, know of me ?”

“That you are beautiful : what more is required ?”

"Enough of this—I am weary. Take me instantly to my sister, or back to my friends who are with Saleh Mohammed; for if I were to denounce you to Ackbar Khan, how much think you your head would be worth?"

"Much less than yours, certainly."

"And at what does he—this *other* barbarian—value me?"

"At the price of six Toorkoman horses, perhaps," was the half-angry response; "while to me you are priceless, beyond life itself. Denounce me to Ackbar Khan—would you?"

"Yes."

His teeth glistened under his jet moustache as he replied—

"Those stones and trees alone hear us; so now let me tell you, Kaffir girl, that you weary me; by the five blessed Keys of Knowledge, you do!" and, as he spoke, he started to his feet, and by an angry twist of his embroidered girdle threw his jewelled sabre behind him.

"Oh, this is becoming frightful!" moaned Mabel, clasping her hands and looking wildly round her; "what will become of me now? Papa, Rose, are we never to meet again?"

Oh, if big, burly Bob Waller, with his six feet and odd inches of stature, were only there! Could he but know of her misery of mind—her dire extremity! but would he ever know? God alone could tell!

There is much that is touching in the helplessness of any woman, but more than all a beautiful one, though we, whose lines are cast in pleasant places, and in a land of well-organized police, may seldom see it—a clinging, imploring expression of eye, when all is soul and depth of heart, and strength avails not. But Zohrab Zubberdust felt nothing of this. She on whom he looked might be pure as Diana, "chaste as Eve on the morning of her innocence," yet, as a Mohammedan, he had a secret contempt for her—perhaps a doubt of her—as a Kaffir woman. He was only inspired by the emotions of triumph and passion, by the sure conviction that this fair Feringhee, this daughter of a vanquished tribe, this outcast unbeliever, so lovely in her whiteness of skin, her purity of complexion, and wondrous colour of hair, in her roundness of limb, and in stature so far surpassing all the maids of the twenty-one Afghan clans or races, was his—*his* property—to become the slave of his will or his cruelty, as it pleased him!

Of the paradox that woman's weakness is her strength, with the Christian man, Zohrab knew nothing, and felt less; yet he tried to act the lover in a melodramatic fashion, by making high-flown speeches, and assuring her, again and again, that he loved her "as the only Prophet of God loved Ayesha, his favourite wife, the mother of all the Faithful," and much more to the same

purpose, till amid the wind that sighed through the trees, and shook the wild tulips and lilies by the lake, the quickened ear of Mabel caught a distant sound ; and then one of those shrill cries of despair, that women alone can give, escaped her.

A fierce malediction from the lips of Zohrab mingled with it, for he dreaded Saleh Mohammed ; and in a few moments more the clink of hoofs was heard ; then Zohrab sternly drew a pistol from his girdle, and unsheathed his sabre like a flash of fire in the moonlight. The blade glittered like his own eyes, as he glared alternately from Mabel to where the sounds came ; and by his keen, wild expression and fierce quivering nostrils, she saw with terror, that a very slight matter might turn his wrath and his weapons against herself.

"Here comes aid—Saleh Mohammed perhaps ! Help, help, in the name of God !" she cried, recklessly.

Zohrab uttered a sound like a hiss, and placed the cold back of his sabre across her throat, implying thereby, "Silence, or death ;" and at that instant, four Afghan horsemen came galloping up, and reined in their nags.

"Bismillah," said the leader, a venerable, burly, and silver-bearded man, in a huge turban.

"Bismillah," responded Zohrab, using also the expression of salutation customary to the country (and which means no more than "good evening" or "good e'en" may do with us), yet regarding the stranger with a somewhat resentful and tiger-like expression of eye for his unwelcome interruption.

"What, Zohrab Zubberdust, is this thou ?" exclaimed the other.

"Shabash—it is I ; and you—are Nouradeen Lal ?" said the would-be lover, as he recognised his acquaintance, the hill-farmer, whose ploughman, perforce, Waller had been ; " whence come you ?"

"From Cabul, where I have been with many an arroba of corn for the Sirdir, who expects to be besieged by the Kaffirs from Jellalabad. Oh ! and so you are at your old tricks again," continued the farmer, with a somewhat unoriental burst of laughter ; "you are not content to wait for the spouses of musk and amber in their couches of pearl—the black-eyed girls with their scarfs of green !"

"Allah Keerem, but he is fortunate," said another, looking admiringly on Mabel ; "most fortunate ! She is fair and white as the virgins of paradise can be."

"But her cry sounded like the bay of a goorg to the rising moon ; and we thought you were an afreet—the Ghoul Babian, or some such horror ; for here are graves close by !"

"Nouradeen Lal is not complimentary," said the other speaker,

who, by his steel cap, spear, and shield of rhinoceros hide, seemed to be a Hazirbashi, or one of Ackbar's body-guard, "if he compare the damsel's voice to the cry of a wolf."

"But why *did* she cry? You were not ill-using her, I hope," said the old farmer, peering down at Mabel's face from under his broad circular turban.

"For the love of God—your God as well as mine—save me from this man!" said Mabel, clinging to the stirrup-leather of the farmer, whose venerable appearance encouraged her, and who placed his strong brown hand on her head encouragingly and protectingly.

"I dare you to interfere!" exclaimed Zohrab, hoarse with passion, as he drew from his girdle the long brass pistol he had just half-cocked and replaced there.

"And why so?" asked the Hazir-bashi, who seemed quite ready for a brawl, and perhaps the appropriation of the girl.

"Because she is—my wife."

"Your wife?" exclaimed Nouradeen, withdrawing his hand abruptly, and swerving round his horse, so that Mabel nearly fell to the ground.

"Yes; we were married before the Cadi: and now she would seek to repudiate me, and return to her own accursed people," said the artful Zohrab; for marriage among the Mohammedans is exclusively a civil ceremony, performed before a Cadi, or magistrate, and not by an Imaum or any other minister of religion, with which it has nothing to do.

"Oh, believe not a word of this; it is false—false!" implored Mabel, with desperation in her tone.

"It is true; and thou, Kaffir, liest! Silence, silence, or I will kill thee!" hissed Zohrab in her ear; and she felt that he was but too capable of putting his threat into execution. "Interfere not with us, I charge you; but leave us, and remember what the fourth chapter of the Koran says, 'If a woman fear ill-usage or aversion from her husband, it shall be no crime in them if they settle the matter amicably between themselves; for a reconciliation is better than a separation;' therefore leave us to agree amicably, as the Prophet hath advised."

"And the same chapter, good Zohrab, tells us how we may chastise such wives as are contumacious, and those captives, too, whom our right hand may possess," said the farmer; "so farewell, and may the steps of you both be fortunate," he added, as he and his three companions galloped laughingly away, and with a wail, as if from her heart, Mabel found herself alone once more in the moonlight solitude—alone with her unscrupulous companion.

CHAPTER LXIV.

AGAIN IN CABUL.

A CHANGE had now come over him ; he had grown sullen and thoughtful ; but even this mood of mind she preferred to his obnoxious and intrusive tenderness. He stood silently and moodily eying her for a time.

Will it be believed that, too probably, he was actually pondering whether or not policy and his own future safety required that he should pistol or sabre this helpless creature, whom a minute before he had been professing so ardently to love ? He could not help speculating on what *might* have been the sequel, regarding himself, had her wild and despairing cry, instead of bringing up a stupid old mountain farmer, like Nouradeen Lal, summoned to the spot the ferocious Dooranee horsemen of Saleh Mohammed, who was bound to account for the prisoners, dead or alive, body for body, to Ackbar Khan. He knew that by this time all the roads diverging from Cabul would be beset in every direction by the horsemen of Saleh Mohammed and the Sirdir ; that, sooner or later, some of these would meet and question the farmer returning to his home among the hills, and the information he and the Hazir-bashi must give, would soon bring a mounted Rissallah round by Beymaru in search and pursuit ; so his own bold measures were instantly taken.

In Cabul would he and his prize alone be safe, and, as he hoped, unsought for a time at least ; and there he resolved to convey her, ere day broke, and to conceal her in the house of one who he knew would be faithful to him—a man named Ferishta Lodi, who had been sutler to the Shah's Goorka Regiment, and whose life he had spared, and whose escape he had connived at, when the whole of that luckless battalion was massacred in cold blood, by the Afghans at Charekar.

Sternly he commanded her again to mount before him, and, aware that resistance and treachery were alike futile, the unhappy girl, crushed in spirit, weeping heavily, and feeling utterly lost and helpless, obeyed ; and once more their progress was resumed, but at a slower pace, as Zohrab was evidently husbanding the strength of his wearied horse. Day was breaking as they passed, unquestioned, through the Kohistan gate of Cabul ; but its light was yet grey and dim as they traversed the narrow, dark, and high-walled tortuous streets, to some obscure quarter perfectly unknown to Mabel.

A few persons passed them, some going to market in the Char-chowk, others afield to tend the trellised vines ; but she dared

neither speak nor show her pallid face. She might find mercy at the hands of Zohrab, but none among the rabble of Cabul, where the miserable remains of the Queen's Envoy yet hung unburied in the great bazaar.

Mabel knew but too well, by observation and experience, the nature of the nation among whom she now found herself—alone. Nearly forty years had made no change on the people, since a Scottish traveller described them ; and his pithy account may be summed up in the following quotation :—

“ If a man could be transported to Afghanistan without passing through the dominions of Turkey, Persia, or Tartary, he would be amazed by the wide and unfrequented deserts and the mountains covered by perennial snow. Even in the cultivated part of the country he would discover a wild assemblage of hills and wastes, unmarked by enclosures, not embellished by trees, and destitute of navigable canals, public roads, and all the great and elaborate productions of human refinement and industry. He would find the towns few and far distant from each other ; he would look in vain for inns and other conveniences, which a traveller would meet with in the wildest parts of Great Britain. Yet he would sometimes be delighted with the fertility and population of particular plains and valleys, where he would see the productions of Europe mingled in profusion with those of the torrid zone, and the land tilled with an industry and judgment nowhere surpassed. He would see the inhabitants accompanying their flocks in tents or villages, to which the terraced roofs and mud walls give an appearance entirely novel. He would be struck with their high and harsh features, their sun-burnt countenances, their long beards, loose garments, and shaggy cloaks of skins. When he entered into society, he would notice the absence of all courts of justice, and of everything like an organised police. He would be surprised at the fluctuation and utter instability of every civil institution. He would find it difficult to comprehend how a nation could subsist in such disorder, and pity those who were compelled to pass their days amid such scenes, and whose minds were trained by their unhappy situation to fraud and violence, to rapine, deceit, and cruel revenge. Yet he could not fail to admire their lofty and martial spirit, their hospitality, their bold and simple manners, equally removed from the suppleness of the citizen and the rusticity of the clown. In short,” he adds, “ a stormy independence of spirit, which leads them to declare, ‘ We are content with fierce discord ; we are content with alarm ; we are content with bloodshed ; but we shall *never be content* with a master ! ’ ”

Mabel gave herself up more than ever for lost on finding herself within the fatal walls of Cabul ; a benumbed and despairing

emotion crept over her heart, and all her energies seemed away from her. She found herself lifted from horseback in a paved court that was dark, damp, and gloomy, and in the centre of which a fountain was plashing monotonously. She felt herself borne indoors somewhere, she knew not by whom, and then she fainted for a little time.

She had been carried into one of those apartments which open by a large sliding panel off the dewan-khaneh, the principal hall or receiving-room of a Cabul house. She had been there deposited at length on a soft mattrass, which was simply spread on the floor, as in that country bedsteads and sofas are alike unknown. So people there both sleep and sit on the floor, unless in the case of persons of rank, who may seat themselves cross-legged on a divan.

Though prettily ornamented with carving, stucco, and painting, in this room there was a total absence of those invariable sentences from the Koran, woven among arabesques, which mark an Oriental mansion ; but in lieu thereof were some in a language of which Mabel's weary eyes could make nothing. These were lines from the Vedas of the Hindoos ; and in three little niches, most elaborately carved, were the three monstrous statuettes of the god who is worshipped by so many millions under the names of Vishnu, Siva, and Brama ; for the house to which she had been conveyed belonged partly to Ferishta Lodi, the ex-sutler, who now kept a shop in the great bazaar, and to a Hindoo, one of those same schroffs or bankers, through whom the luckless General Elphinstone and his staff had negotiated the enormous sum which was paid to procure our peaceful march through the passes—and paid for our slaughtered troops—in vain.

The Hindoo banker and the Khond were alike absent ; but the wife of the former, a soft-eyed and gentle little woman, with massive gold bangles on her wrists and glittering anklets round her ankles, assisted the somewhat awkward and decidedly bewildered Zohrab in the task of recovering Mabel, by plentifully besprinkling her face, neck, and hands with cool and delightfully perfumed water from a large flask covered with elaborate filagree work. The Hindoo woman, who knew that the visitor was a helpless Feringhee captive, worked at her humane duty in silence, and without venturing to ask any questions.

A quivering of the long eyelashes, a spasmotic twitching of the handsomely cut mouth, as she heaved a long and deep sigh, showed that animation was returning. Slowly, indeed, did Mabel—though a girl with naturally a good physique and splendid constitution—struggle back to life and consciousness. Her beautiful face was pale as marble now ; all complexion, save that of alabaster, was gone ; cold and white she was, and her brilliant

auburn hair in silky masses rolled over her shoulders and bosom, which heaved painfully, for every respiration was a sigh.

To the admiring and undoubtedly appreciative eyes of the enterprising Zohrab she presented a powerful contrast to the dusky little Hindoo woman, on whose ridgy shoulder her head was drooping, and whose fingers, of bronze-like hue, seemed absolutely black when placed upon the pure snowy arm of the English girl ; for in aspect, race, and costume (a shapeless and indescribable garment of red cotton) the wife of the schroff was unchanged from what her ancestors had been in the days of Menou the Law-giver.

As Mabel gradually became conscious, she sat up and gently repelled the services of the Hindoo woman. Then she burst into tears. This relieved her ; and then she began to look around her, and to remember where she was—in fatal Kabul ; and in whose hands—those of the lying, treacherous, and unscrupulous Zohrab Zubberdust !

For what was she yet reserved ? This was her first thought. The slender chances of escape were the next ; but escape from walled and guarded Kabul ! and to where or to whom could she go for succour ? To the bones of the dead, who lay in the passes of the Khyber mountains !

Thirst—intense thirst, the result of over-wrought emotions, of deep and bitter anxiety, and of all she had undergone mentally and bodily, made her ask Zohrab imploringly for something to quench it ; and in a few moments the Hindoo woman brought her, on a scarlet Burmese salver, a china cup filled with deliciously iced water and white Kabul wine, which is not unlike full-bodied Madeira ; with this refreshing beverage was a cake of Kabul apricots, folded in rice paper, the most luscious of all dried fruit, and which the Afghans have no less than fourteen distinct modes of conserving. To these she added a small slice of sweet Bokhara melon—the true melon of Toorkistan—we say a small slice, as they are of such enormous bulk, that *two* are sometimes a sufficient load for a donkey.

Revived by these delicate viands, and feeling a necessity for action, Mabel began in plaintive and piteous accents to urge upon Zohrab the chances of pecuniary reward, if he would set her at liberty near Jellalabad, or if he would even restore her to the perilous guardianship of Saleh Mohammed ; for to be once more among the English hostages, his prisoners, was to be, at least, among dear friends.

But Zohrab listened in sullen and tantalising silence, gnawing the curled ends of his long moustaches the while. Now that he had her in Kabul, he saw but slender chances of getting her out of it for a time. Gossips might speak of her presence there (was

it not already known to the Hindoo woman?), and so inculpate him with Ackbar Khan, whose vengeance would be swift, sharp, and sure. And now he was beginning to revolve in his own mind, whether or not his best policy would be to take his horse and quit the country for Khiva, Cashmere, or Beloochistan—all were many miles away, the latter three hundred and more—leaving Mabel in the hands of the banker and merchant, to keep or deliver up, as they chose. Yet when he thought of the peculiar *creed* of the Khond he shuddered; and she looked so beautiful, so gentle, and was withal so helpless, that he wavered in his selfish purpose, and the temptation of hoping to win her made him pause in forming any decided resolution; so the noon of the first day passed slowly and uneventfully on.

He knew that Mabel, as an European woman, dared make no attempt to escape, or even to show her face at a window; so he had no necessity either to watch or to warn her when he left her.

In tears and silence she lay on her pallet, her head propped upon pillows; near her the Hindoo woman had kindly placed a vase of fresh flowers, a feather fan, and a flask of essences; and then, left to herself for hours, she could but wait, and weep, and pray at intervals, dreading the coming night.

Some of the sounds without in Cabul were not unfamiliar to her; she had often heard them before, when driving through the central street in the carriage, or when riding with the other ladies of the garrison. Again, at stated times, she heard the shrill cries from the minarets and summits of the mosques proclaim that the hour for prayer had arrived; for the Moslems observe this frequently daily. “Glorify God,” says the Koran, “when the evening overtaketh you, and when you rise in the morning; and unto Him be praise in heaven and on earth; and at sunset, and when you rest at noon, for prayer is the pillar of religion, and key of paradise.”

Once she peeped forth between the parted shutters and blinds, shrinking back timidly as she did so, lest her pale white face should catch a casual passer's eye, and elicit a yell of recognition and of thirst for Christian blood. There the street below was dark and narrow; the clumsy wooden pipes projected far over, to carry off the rain from the roofs, which were flat and terraced; the walls were high, black, and almost windowless. Such was her view on one side. The other opened to a paved court, overlooked by houses built of sun-dried brick, rough stones, and red clay. Four mulberry-trees grew there, with a white marble fountain in the midst; and near it were some grizzly-bearded Afghans of mature years, in long, flowing garments, smoking and playing marbles, exactly as children do in Europe. Another

party, also of full-grown men, were hopping against each other, on their right legs, grasping their left feet with their right hands. They seemed all pleasant fellows, hilarious and in high good humour ; yet she dared neither to seek their aid, nor to trust to their compassion. In her eyes, they were but as so many tigers at play !

The circumstance of her being deemed the prisoner, the slave, or peculiar property of such a formidable soldier as Zohrab Zubberdust, secured her from all interruption on the part of his male friends, the Khond and the Hindoo schroff, who jointly occupied the house in which he had placed her, and which was situated at the bottom of a narrow alley (opening off the main street that led to the Char Chowk, or great bazaar), a regular *cul-de-sac*, where many Khonds lived together, congregating precisely as the Irish do in the towns of England and Scotland ; but this was deemed no peculiarity in Cabul, where the city was apportioned in quarters, to the different tribes of the Afghan people, the most formidably fortified being that of the Kussil-bashes.

As evening drew on, Mabel became aware of a conversation that was proceeding in the next room ; and, as she could from time to time detect the voice of Zohrab, she thought herself fully excusable in listening, which she could do with ease, as the partitions of the apartments which opened off the dewan-khaneh were all of them boarding panelled.

In one place a knot had dropped out, and to the convenient orifice made thereby, as she breathlessly applied her ear and eye alternately, she heard and saw all that was passing, and in some respects more than she cared to know, as much that she did hear only added to her repugnance and terror of those on whose mercy she found herself cast by an unhappy fate.



CHAPTER LXV.

THE ABODE OF THE KHOND.

SEATED on the floor were Zohrab Zubberdust and two other men.

One was the Hindoo banker. He was slight in figure, with diminutive hands and feet ; like all his vast race, he was of a dark-brown colour, with straight black hair, that seemed almost blue when the light struck it, hanging straight and lankly behind his large ears—an undoubted worshipper of Brama, of the monkey god, and of all those unnumbered idols that for forty

centuries have been the objects of adoration to millions upon millions—even before the Temple of Juggernaut was built. He sat cross-legged on a *nummud*, or carpet of red frieze, above which was spread a yellow calico covering. A cushion supported his back. He had cast off his head-dress, slippers, and tunic—the day had been warm—and all save his loose dhottee, or what passed for unmentionables. He had the eye of Siva painted in the centre of his forehead (the eye that, by winking once, involved the world in darkness for a thousand years), thereby adding to the diabolical grotesquerie of his visage; and he was occupied from time to time by indulgence in the “eighth sensual delight” of the Hindoos—chewing betel-nut, a hot and aromatic stimulant.

The other interesting native of India who sat beside him, smoking hemp-seed and bhang in a handsome hubble-bubble, which had snake-like coils covered with red and gold-coloured thread rising from a stem of silver, shaped like a trumpet, was Ferishta Lodi, the Khond, whose attire consisted of little more than the amount indulged in by his Hindoo friend; but, unlike the puny latter, he was a man of powerful and muscular frame, great in stature, and terribly hideous in face and figure. He was rather pale-complexioned, for a Khond; but his visage bars description, for ugliness of contour and expression,—it was that of a tiger, but a tiger pitted with small-pox, the few wiry bristles of his moustache that stuck fiercely out from his long, upper lip, the fiery carbuncular red of his eyes, with two long and sharp side tusks, completing the illusion or resemblance.

Looking wonderfully handsome by contrast to those two men, Zohrab lounged between them, propped against the wall by a soft cushion; his bright steel cap, his beautiful Persian sabre, and gilded pistols lay near him; he had a long cherry-pipe stick in his mouth, and close by was a flask of Cabul wine, in which, notwithstanding the wise precepts of him of Mecca, he was indulging, greatly to Mabel's apprehension, somewhat freely.

“And so, Ferishta,” said he, “the infernal Kussilbashes are in search of me, too, you say?”

“Yes—aga ; three rissallahs, at least.”

“From where?”

“Shireen’s fort.”

“And led by whom?”

“The Khan Shireen in person.”

“But how know you that they are after me?”

“Because I heard Shireen say, when he met Mohammed Saleh near Baber’s tomb, that had he not been certain that the false plotter was Overbearing Zohrab, he might imagine that an evil spirit, like Sakkar, had assumed his shape and voice, to

delude them both and the Feringhee woman too. But that is all bosh, for who believes in such things now?"

The dark eyes of Zohrab sparkled dangerously. He might have pardoned some such slighting speech in a devout Hindoo, even in a Christian ; but in a Jew, or one professing the horrible tenets of a Khond, he could not let it pass without remark.

"Dare you say that the evil spirit, Sakkar, did not once assume the shape of Solomon on possessing himself of his magic signet, and alter all the laws of the world for forty days and nights?"

"I dare say nothing about it," replied the other, sulkily ; "I am a Khond."

"And, as such, accursed of God!" muttered Zohrab, under his teeth ; for at that precise juncture of his affairs he could afford to quarrel with none—his present hosts least of all.

The banker looked uneasy, and crammed into his mouth an extra allowance of the eighth delight, ever the solace of the Hindoo race, and held in such estimation that Ferishta, the Moslem historian, writing in 1609, when describing the magnitude of the Indian city of Canaye, says that it contained thirty thousand shops for the sale of betel-nut alone.

Zohrab, though he sometimes broke the laws of the Koran, just as many an excellent Christian, or one who perfectly believes himself to be such, may transgress the laws of his Bible, loathed the unbelieving Khond as he should have loathed a Jew or a fire-worshipping Gueber ; but, circumstanced as he was, he felt himself compelled to listen to a speech like the following ; for the Khonds are a low race of idolaters, and glory in announcing themselves as such, and in decrying the gentler creeds of others.

"The faith of your prophet would never have suited us, Aga Zohrab, though we cannot say, like the Bedouins, we have no water in the desert, and therefore cannot perform ablutions, as we have wells, and to spare, in our sacred groves ; but like those Bedouins, our people, who dwell in rocks and on the mountains, have no money ; therefore we cannot give alms ; while the forty days' fast of Ramadan must prove useless to poor people who fast all the year round ; and if the presence of God be everywhere, why go all the way to seek him in a black stone at Mecca? Besides, your prophet, like that of the Feringhees, teaches, I am told, repentance—a perilous institute, for may not a man say, 'I may commit a thousand crimes, and, if I repent me, I may be forgiven ; and as it will thus be no worse for me I may as well continue to sin and enjoy myself unto the end ! Is it not so, aga ?'

Zohrab, more of a soldier than a logician, and readier with his sabre than his tongue, was unable quite to follow the strange argument of the Khond ; he could only glare at him with bent

brows and dilated nostrils, while asserting angrily that which had nothing exactly to do with the matter—that he believed devoutly in the power and miracles of his Prophet—that the waters gushed at will from the fingers of the latter—that he was conveyed by a mysterious animal, called a Borak, from Mecca to Jerusalem—that in one night he performed a journey of ten thousand years—that a holy pigeon, sent from heaven, whispered revelations in his ear,—not to pick peas thereat, as the accursed Kaffirs asserted,—that he proselytised the Genii, and did many more incredible things; to all of which the Hindoo, whose beliefs were altogether of a different kind, listened with the stolid aspect of one of his own bronze idols; but the Khond did so with covert mockery on his terrible face, while poor Mabel dreaded a growing quarrel, as it was evident that the fiery and impatient Zohrab abhorred the companionship and protection of Ferishta Lodi; for he was a reckless soldier, valuing his own life little, and the lives of others less.

It was evident that, in the heat of the present discussion, he had forgotten all about *her*, till suddenly the Khond said—

“We talk too loud, aga, and may be overheard. I told you who were on your track—”

“Yes; and by the eight gates of paradise, and the seven gates of hell, I am not likely to forget them!”

“Well, have you taken means to ensure flight?”

“Wherefor?” asked Zohrab, fiercely.

“I mean, if traced.”

“I have my sword and horse,” was the curt reply.

“But the Feringhee woman?”

“Allah! I had all but forgotten her,” said Zohrab, starting.

“Right: sacrifice your property for your life, and your life for your religion; but make not yourself the captive of a woman. Now, if traced, what, I ask, of the Kaffir slave?”

“By the soul of the Prophet!” exclaimed Zohrab, in great and sudden perplexity, “what can I do but leave her here?”

“Sell her to the young Shah: she is worth a thousand mohurs,” suggested the Hindoo banker.

“The coward has fled,” said Zohrab.

“She is beautiful as the one he lost, and whom he mourned so much that it required the whole seraglio to console him.”

“Poor fellow!” sneered Zohrab.

“I will buy her of you for two hundred tomauns, paid down,” said the Khond. “Money is useful to those who are fugitives.”

“Buy her—for a wife?” asked Zubberdust, changing colour. The Khond laughed, and his laugh was as the growl of some strange animal, as he replied—

“No; a Khond marries a Khond.”

"For what, then?"

"The purposes of that religion we have been discussing just now," replied the other, deliberately and in a low voice.

Mabel heard this suggestion without exactly comprehending what it meant at the time; but she could see that a crimson flush of shame and passion came over the dark face of Zohrab; his eyes literally sparkled and flashed with the fury of deep and sudden passion as he sprang to his feet, snatched up his sabre, and half drew it, choking with intensity of utterance ere he could speak; for the Khonds are a race of cruel and barbarous idolaters, who live in the more inaccessible mountain ranges of India, and were quite unknown till the beginning of her present Majesty's reign, when, by the military operations undertaken in Goomsoor and on the Chilka Lake—a long and narrow inlet from the sea—and when our troops from thence ascended the range of Ghauts, we made the acquaintance of this most ancient but hitherto unknown race of aborigines, whose religion, a distinct Theism, with a subordinate demonology, requires (as Captain Macpherson first discovered) a human sacrifice periodically to the godhead, the fetish or spirit whom they style Boora Penna, or the Source of Good, who created all things by casting five handfuls of earth around him; but, like more enlightened folks, the Khonds have their schismatics and sceptics, who dispute bitterly, and hate each other as cordially as Christians can do—but about the origin of mountains, meteors, and whirlwinds, where the rivers come from, where they go to, and so forth.

It is to Tari, the wife of this Boora Penna, that the propitiatory human sacrifices are periodically offered (in groves which are dark, gloomy, and deemed holy as those of our Druids were in Europe), amid the most horrible rites, roasting over a slow fire, for one, about the time when the ground is cropped, so that each family may procure and bury a little of the victim's flesh in the soil, to ensure prosperity, and avert the malignity of the goddess, who otherwise might blast their rice, maize, or vines; and the immolation takes place amid wild jollity, deep drunkenness, and debauchery.

Aware of the complete isolation and helplessness of Mabel, the Khond saw how readily and easily he had a victim at hand; and what could prove more acceptable to Tari than the young, beautiful, and pure daughter of an alien race and creed? And the Hindoo schroff, accustomed to the incessant infanticide practised by his people, and their death-festivals at Juggernaut, saw nothing remarkable in the matter, and sat chewing his betel-nut with perfect equanimity.

Not so Zohrab Zubberdust! His passion knew no bounds. He had sprung to his feet, and fully unsheathed his sabre,

" May thy mother's grave be defiled—if indeed such be possible, O dog of an idolater!" he exclaimed, and was about to cut him down; and doubtless might have sliced his head in two, like a pumpkin, but for sudden sounds in the now partially darkened street without, that arrested the uplifted sabre.

These were the loud murmur of a multitude, the barking of pariah dogs, the trampling of horses, the voices of men in authority, and other undoubted tokens of the house being surrounded.

The glittering blade of Zohrab drooped for a moment. He passed his left hand across his brow. Then he smiled with proud disdain as he placed his steel cap on his head, and twisted the turban-cloth around it. Next he drew a pistol from his belt, while the diminutive Hindoo became pea-green with fear, and an expression of almost mad ferocity seemed to pass over the face and to swell the great chest of the Khond, Ferishta Lodi. Danger and death were at hand, he knew; but not on whom they might fall.

Zohrab rushed to a window on one side. The narrow alley was filled by a mass of armed men on foot and on horseback. He saw the mail-shirts of the Hazir-bashis, the flashing of weapons, and the red smoky light of the matches in the locks of the juzails. He hurried to another window: it opened to the court where the mulberry-trees grew. It was full of red-capped Kussilbashes, mounted and accoutred, some carrying red flashing torches; and high amid the excited and bristling throng towered old Shireen Khan on his favourite camel. He was brandishing his long lance, and gesticulating violently to Saleh Mohammed, who was mounted on a beautiful white Tartar horse.

The opening of the window caused them and many others to look up. Then Zohrab was seen and recognised by several.

" Dog, whose father has been damned! at last, at last, we have thee?" hissed Saleh Mohammed, through his dense beard, as he shook his sabre upward; and a yell from his people followed, mingled with the thunder of mallets on the entrance door.

" Dog of a Dooranee thief, take that!" cried the reckless Zohrab, firing his long pistol full at Saleh Mohammed (beside whom a man fell dead), and then taking his measures in an instant, he rushed from the room, and ascending by a narrow stair to the roof of the house, which he knew to be flat, by super-human strength he tore up the ladder, cutting off pursuit—for a mere wooden ladder it was—and tossed it on the heads of the armed throng below. A number of large clay vases, filled with gigantic geraniums and other flowers, with four cross-legged marble idols of Siva, Deva, Vishnu, and Brahma, the property of

the banker, he hurled down in quick succession also, to increase the danger and confusion ; and each, as it fell crashing upon the turbanned heads, the brown upturned faces, and fierce eyes that gleamed in the torchlight below, elicited a storm of yells and the useless explosion of several rifles which were levelled upward, and the balls from which either starred upon the walls or whistled harmlessly away into the darkness.

Zohrab, brave as a lion, now almost leisurely reloaded his long pistol, and felt the edge and point of his sabre with the forefinger of his left hand. It was an old Ispahan sword—one of those famous blades made and tempered by Zaman, the pupil of Asad. Formed of Akbarer steel, it rung like a bell, and Zohrab valued this sword as second only to his own soul. He had taken it in battle from an old Beloochee, who was following Mehrib Khan to the siege of Khelat, and it was valued at two thousand rupees. Many times had that good weapon saved his life ; it had ever been at his side by day, or under his pillow by night ; and now he kissed it tenderly, with fervour in his heart and a prayer on his lips, for a knowledge came over him that, though he might escape, the *end* seemed close and nigh. He looked to the sky ; it was enveloped in masses of flying clouds.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, hopefully, "the star of Zohrab may yet again shine out in God's blessed firmament!"

Then he looked over the sea of flat-terraced roofs that spread around him, and from amid which the round, dark domes of the mosques and the greater mass of the Bala Hissar—rock, tower, and rampart, tier upon tier—stood abruptly up ; and over these roofs he knew that he must make his way, if he would escape some dreadful death, such as impalement by a hot ramrod prior to decapitation ; for Ackbar Khan and Saleh Mohammed would accord him small mercy indeed.

"Kill him!"

"Slay the ghorumsaug!"

"Drink his blood!"

"Death to the Sooni!" cried some.

"Death to the follower of Shi!" cried others, equally at random. Such were some of the shouts that loaded the night air in the streets below, where the blue gleaming of keen sabres, of tall lances, and long juzail-bayonets was incessant ; for not only the house, but even the alley itself was environed on all hands.

"A *chupao** with a vengeance!" muttered Zohrab, as by one vigorous bound he leaped from the roof on which he stood to that of the opposite street, the distance between being little more than six or seven feet. The action was not unseen ; a heavy

* Night attack.

volley of rifle-shot whizzed upward—we say, *whizzed*, for the bullets were round, not conical. There was a furious spurring of horses, a rush of the crowd, and many armed men now entered the houses, to make their way upon the roofs, and to attack or capture him there; but Zohrab, light, active, and lithe, only waited to draw breath, ere he sprang across the deep, dark gulf of another narrow street, then another, and another.

Meanwhile, forgotten and left to herself, Mabel, with terror, heard all these hostile sounds dying away in the distance. Her just indignation at Zubberdust for the cruel trick he had played, and the new dangers amid which he had left her, had now passed away; and amid the fears she had for her own future fate, she was too womanly, too generous, and too tender of heart, not to feel intense compassion for a single human being—a brave young man, too—hunted in this terrible fashion from house-top to house-top, like a wild animal. Yet she could but tremble, cower on her knees, utter pious invocations in whispers, and, pausing, listen fearfully to the dropping fire of shots and the occasional yells in echoing streets without, till a firm and bold grasp was laid upon her tender arm. She looked up, and found herself looked down upon by the hideous face of the Khond, then lighted up by an indescribable expression. She remembered all she had overheard, and all she had read in “Macpherson’s Religion of the Khonds,” and she became well-nigh palsied with fear.

“O my God!” she exclaimed, and closed her eyes. Then, that she might see no more of that horrible visage, being dressed like an Afghan woman, she instantly lowered her veil, according to the custom which has prevailed in the East ever since the days when “Rebekah took one, when she perceived Isaac coming towards her, and covered herself;” but with a fierce mocking laugh the Khond tore it off, and, after surveying her fully and boldly, went out, securing the panel of the room behind him by a strong wooden bolt.

Four, five, even seven streets were crossed in mid air, in a succession of flying leaps, by Zohrab successfully, when, just as breath was beginning to fail him, a shot from a juzail ripped up his right thigh, rending the muscles fearfully, and the blood from a lacerated artery issued in a torrent from the wound.

“May the snares of Satan and the thunder-smitten be on the head of him who fired the shot!” moaned Zohrab, as he reeled and staggered, unable to leap again, while on the flat-terraced roof of a house he had left there came swarming up several dismounted Dooranees, armed with rifles, swords, and pistols.

He faced furiously about: the roof was perfectly open, for there was neither cornice nor parapet to crouch behind. He

fired both his pistols, and with each shot a man dropped in quick succession. At the same moment several balls were fired at him ; three struck him in the body, and he sank half-powerless on his knees, but in weakness—not supplication. He hurled his pistols at his destroyers, and then, lest any of them should ever possess his beloved Ispahan sword, he snapped the blade across his knee as if it had been brittle glass, and cast the glittering fragments among the crowd below.

In a piercing voice he exclaimed, as he threw up his arms, “Ei dereeghâ, ei dereeghâ, oo ei dereegh ! Would to Thee, O God, that I had never been tempted—had never seen her !” and then inspired by what emotion we know not, unless it were to seek succour for Mabel, and to have her saved from the terrible Khond, he took off the cloth of his turban, the *last* appeal a Mohammedan can make when imploring mercy for himself or a friend, and was waving it above his head, when a ball pierced his brain ; he gave a convulsive bound upwards, and fell dead and mangled into the street below.

In half an hour after this, the head of “Zohrab the Over-bearing” was placed in the public Char-chowk, beside that of the unfortunate baronet, Sir William Macnaghten.



CHAPTER LXVI.

THE SHADE WITHIN THE SHADOW.

So one more dreadful tragedy had been enacted in that land of bloodshed !

Barbarous though she deemed the Mohammedan Afghans, she was to find herself in the grasp of those who were more barbarous still—for whose depth of cruelty there was no name—the Khonds, a race or tribe whose sacrifices of human life, though not offered up in such numbers as those of the Thugs, were done in a fashion quite as secret, and known only to themselves, and whose existence, like that of those subtle assassins, had become only known to the Indian Government of late years.

Powerless in the hands of Ferishta Lodi, the girl felt as if hovering on the verge of some death of which she knew not the form or fashion, save that it must be lingering, protracted, and horrible !

Her past life, with all its peace, happiness, and ease, its gaiety, luxury, brilliance, and good position, seemed to be, as it was indeed, like a previous state of existence—as a dream ; the horrible present appeared alone the stern reality. Was her identity the same ? she asked of herself many, many times, in

half-audible whispers ; or had she undergone that species of metempsychosis, or transmigration of soul from the body of one being to the body of another, which is a doctrine of the Indian Brahmins—of those Hindoos whom she was now beginning to loathe ? Was she no longer Mabel Trecarrel, a Christian woman, a civilised European, who had a father, a sister, and so many friends ? Was the existence of Waller, or was her own, a myth ? She felt as if she was about to become insane, and, pressing her delicate hands upon her throbbing temples, prayed God to preserve her senses, whatever her ultimate fate might be.

Surely, unknown to herself, she must have committed some great sin to be tortured thus, and thus punished, enduring here that she might not endure hereafter, was her next idea.

The six months or so which had elapsed since that stirring morning on which the army, under its aged and dying general, with its mighty encumbrance of camp-followers, began its homeward march for India from the old familiar cantonments seemed as so many ages to Mabel Trecarrel now ! So many well-known faces and happy existences had been swept away ; so complete a change had come over all the few who survived, and their prospects seemed so strange and dark. So much misery, so many sent to untimely deaths—it could not be said to their graves, as the Afghans never interred one of our dead.

What did it all mean ? Why did Heaven so persecute, or leave to their fate, so many Christians in the hands of utter infidels ?

Voces again roused her to action—at least to listen.

They were those of the Khond and the Hindoo conversing in Hindostanee.

“So, so,” said the former, chuckling, “all is over with Zohrab ; he can ‘overbear’ no longer.”

“Yes ; the head he carried so proudly is gone to the gate of the Char-chowk ; but the Kussilbashes are still in the street, and I wish they were gone to their own quarter.”

“Why ?”

“They may take a fancy to our heads, too.”

“Why, I say ?” asked the Khond, fiercely.

“Can you ask ?—if the Feringhee woman is not forthcoming.”

“She is mine, and I have saved my two hundred tomauns.”

“How yours ?”

“Zohrab is gone ; none seem to know that she is here ; and you will be silent, if you are wise. Ackbar Khan would like an excuse to plunder a schroff so rich as you ; hence you must, I know, be silent.”

The last words sounded more like a threat than an advice or an entreaty, as the voice of the fierce Khond accentuated them ;

the sly Hindoo, however, made some evasive response, and then Mabel heard him draw on his slippers and tunic and shuffle from the room. Where he went she knew not ; but, after a time, with an exclamation of anger and mistrust, the Khond tossed aside the mouth-piece of his hubble-bubble, and followed him.

So the Kussilbashes were still in the adjacent streets ! Could she but reach them ! They were gallant and soldierly fellows, though, till of late, as bitter foes of the British troops as any tribe in the country. But now the politics of their Khan had begun to change, and he had kept aloof from Ackbar and his interests. She once more applied herself to the windows. Many dark figures were hovering about in the street, and looking up at the house. Who or what these people were she knew not. The courtyard was quite empty ; but she heard the clatter of hoofs and the clink of arms, as horsemen rode hastily to and fro in the main thoroughfare that led to the bazaar.

She was in perfect darkness now.

She sought feebly to draw or push down the panel that separated her from the dewan-khaneh ; but the wooden bolt secured it beyond all the efforts of her humble strength to force a way ; and she feared to make the least noise, lest, by being caught in the act of escaping, she might only accelerate her own fate.

Breathlessly she listened !

Sounds passed at intervals through the large and scantily furnished chambers of the slenderly built house. The floors being all uncarpeted, and the windows without draperies, in the fashion of the country, the edifice was liable to produce strange echoes, and Mabel strove to gather from these something of good or bad augury as they fell on her overstrained ear.

Ah, were she but once more back in the hitherto abhorred fort of Saleh Mohammed—back to the sad companionship of the hostages—to the shelter and counsel of her own sex and people ! In the power of the Khond she felt, truly and terribly, that if they had much to dread and to anticipate when in the fort, she had much that was more immediate to dread now ; that within every shade there may be a deeper shadow. Rose could never know her fate, or how she had perished in seeking to rejoin her ; and she might have to die and never know the story of the younger sister she loved so dearly.

Suddenly, amid her sad reverie, she heard the sound of heavy boots, the brown-tanned jorabs of Afghan horsemen, and the cadence of various guttural voices in the dewan-khaneh. Then a red light streamed through the jointings of the panelling wall. The wooden bolt outside was shot back ; the great central panel slid down in its grooves, and within the square outline it left,

framed as if in a picture, with the red smoky glare of an upheld torch falling strongly upon him, stood the tall and grim but most picturesque figure of the old Khan of the Dooranees, Saleh Mohammed, with one brown bony hand thrust into his yellow Cashmere girdle, and the other resting on the jewelled hilt of his sheathed sabre.

His bushy beard concealed alike the form of his mouth and chin ; but his slender hooked nose, with arching nostril, his shaggy brows, and keen eagle-like eyes indicated firmness, decision, and rapidity of thought and action. He wore a loose and ample chogah of scarlet cloth, lined with fine fur, and richly embroidered ; a short matchlock, beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl, was slung upon his back, with a silk handkerchief bound over its lock for protection ; his girdle bristled with the usual number of elaborate knives, daggers, and pistols ; and he wore a green turban to indicate his assumed or acknowledged descent from the Prophet.

With something of kindness mingled with sternness, he held out a hand to the drooping Mabel, and raised her from her knees ; for she was half sitting and half reclining, hopelessly and weakly, against the wooden partition ; and he saw how pale and piteous she looked. Now old Saleh had several wives and daughters in a secluded fort among the Siah Sung Hills, and he was not without some promptings of human sympathy in his heart.

"Come," said he ; "with me you are safe, and shall go back to your friends. From Shireen Khan I have been told how Zohrab, that liar who is now hanging over hell by the tongue, deceived you."

She thankfully placed her hand in that of the Dooranee chief, for, after the tiger-like visage of the Khond, his bearded face and venerable aspect were as those of a father to her, and most gratefully she welcomed him.

The hint of the Khond, that Ackbar Khan, or some of the other Khans, whose number was legion in Cabul, might confiscate his substance and appropriate his hard-won mohurs, to-mauns, rupees, and good English guineas, had not been lost on the quiet and acquisitive Hindoo banker, who had straightway betaken him to Mohammed Saleh in the street, just as he was collecting his men to depart, and, to make his peace with all, had surrendered Mabel, while, for some reason known to himself alone, he had no future fear of Ferishta Lodi's anger.

As Mabel was too weak to ride on a side-saddle, and to walk was, of course, impossible, a palanquin was soon procured, and in that she was rapidly conveyed by four bearers in the fashion to which she was quite accustomed, away from the city, under

the shadow of the great Bala Hissar, past the tomb of Baber, and round between the Siah Sung Hills and the Cabul river, once more to the fort of Saleh Mohammed, where, just as day was breaking, she was roused from a slumber that was full of painful visions and nervous startings, to find herself welcomed by pure English tongues and by the embraces of her companions in misfortune, the lady hostages of Elphinstone's hapless army.

A severe illness, consequent on all her delicate frame had undergone, now fell upon Mabel—a nervous illness, which her friends were without the means of alleviating, when on the, to them, most memorable 25th of August, came the cruel order of Ackbar Khan for the immediate transmission of all to Toorkistan, where he had condemned them all to sale and slavery—an order consequent on his fury at the retention of Jellalabad, and the combined advance of General Pollock and Sir Robert Sale upon Cabul.

So on that day, by horse, on foot, on camels, or in dhooleys, the hapless females and children, a few accompanied by husbands and fathers, the sick, the wounded, and the ailing, all in misery, in tears, and despair, under Saleh Mohammed and a strong guard of Dooranees, set forth towards the frontier of the land where they were to be scattered and lost to their friends and to freedom for ever—the land of Toorkistan, a name so vaguely given to all that vast, lawless, and uncivilized region that lies between the plateau of Central Asia and the shores of the Caspian Sea!



CHAPTER LXVII.

ROSE IN A NEW CHARACTER.

LOVERS are more interesting to each other than they can ever possibly prove to third or fourth parties ; yet we cannot preserve the unity of our story and lose sight of Denzil and Rose Tre-carrel, whose case and circumstances were altogether exceptional ; for, certainly, few lovers have been precisely situated as they were, in this age of the world at least.

Yet the course of their love was not fated to “run smooth,” though, in the care of Shireen Khan, no such perils menaced them as those which beset Mabel and her companion, or, still more, those who were the immediate prisoners of Ackbar, unless we refer to the watch kept on the Kussilbash fort, by some of the fanatical Ghazees, who, on discovering that Feringhee prisoners were there, thought to add to their own chances of salvation by cutting them off.

In this late affair with Zorab, Shireen had permitted Denzil to go, armed and mounted, with a party of twenty Kussilbashes in search of him and Mabel, round by the hills of Beymaru, the borders of the Lake of Istaliff, and other places over which he and Waller had hunted and shot together, often in the more peaceful time that was past. After his months of seclusion and useless inactivity, Denzil, apart from the natural excitement and anxiety resulting from the object in view—the rescue of Mabel and the reunion of the sisters—felt a joyous emotion on finding himself once more an armed man, astride a magnificent horse, and spurring like the wind along the steep mountain slopes, through fertile valley and foaming river, at the head of twenty soldierly fellows, in fur caps with red bags, flaming scarlet chogahs, and glittering lances.

Shireen had perfect confidence in according to him this unusual liberty, knowing, as he said dryly to the Khanum, his wife, that “while they retained the hen in the roost, the cock-bird would not go far off.” He was surprised, however, that Denzil, when on this expedition, could by no means be persuaded to wear his remarkable yellow silk robe, with the embroidered letters and sphynxes, which was supposed to be his war dress, or to indicate his rank as a great Nawab or Bahadoor of the Queen of England.

In the ardour of the chase, Denzil took a wrong direction, and over-exerted himself to repair the error ; he rode with his party beyond Loghur, and the reach of all probable places where the abductor was likely to be found ; and then, at a time when the midsummer sun was intensely hot, and the atmosphere filled with steamy and miasmatic exhalations from the rice-fields, he swam his horse through three rivers, at points where the water rose nearly to his neck.

A fever and ague—nearly regular jungle-fever—combined with some other ailment, were the result of this rashness ; and on the second day after, Denzil found himself prostrate on a bed of sickness.

By the Khan, he and Rose had been duly informed of the narrow escapes of her sister ; of the wile by which she had been lured from the fort of Saleh Mohammed, at whose rage and want of circumspection the more wary Shireen laughed heartily ; of the trickery and reckless valour of Zohrab Zubberdust, and the horrible schemes of the Khond, happily averted by the timidity and avarice of the Hindoo schroff ; and Rose felt grateful to heaven—intensely so in her heart—that her “dear, dear Mab” was safe once more, or comparatively so, in the companionship of sorrow—for such she knew it must inevitably be, with Lady Sale, her widowed daughter, the widow of the Envoy, and other captives of Ackbar; though, by chances she had not foreseen,

their meeting was delayed—she could only hope and pray, for a time.

These episodes and the tenour of the life they all led in the sequestered fort, with the daily looking forward to some startling event or catastrophe, a battle, a revolution, even an earthquake, as a means to set them free, seemed to tame down and sadden much of Rose's constitutional heedlessness ; besides, the illness of Denzil was a genuine source for present sorrow and growing anxiety.

He was alternately in a burning fever and then in icy perspirations ; he had intense pains in the head and loins, a heavy sickness, a weariness over all his limbs, a listlessness of spirit, a general sinking and rapid wasting of the whole system, with a thirst that at times could not be alleviated by the simple sanguaree or sherbet, *i.e.*, lime-juice and sugar, prepared for him by the Khanum. Denzil inherited from his mother, Constance Devereaux, a more delicate physique and nervous organisation than that possessed by his hardier father ; hence he was the more calculated to succumb to the subtle ailment that had fastened on him now ; but neither he nor those about him thought of danger yet.

The old white-bearded and black-robed Hakeem, Aber Malee, who attended the inhabitants of the fort, and came thither from the city every other day, on his donkey, prescribed decoctions of honey, which is recommended by the Koran as a sovereign “medicine for man.” He did more : with intense solemnity, he copied many texts or prescriptions from the pages of the same book, on strips of parchment, then washed them off into a cup of water from the holy well at Baber’s tomb, and gave it to his patient to swallow ; but whenever he departed, Rose or Denzil tossed them over the window ; so, left thus, altogether without medical attendance, the disease took a deeper and more permanent root.

Rose had now gladly relinquished the Afghan female dress. Amid the plentiful supply of plunder of every kind gleaned up by the Kussilbashes in the track of the retreating army, were several overland bullock-trunks and portmanteaus filled with clothing. Among these, some of which had doubtless belonged to her own lady friends, Rose was fain to make selections ; thus, one evening in June, when the sun was setting behind the black mountains, throwing across the broad green valley where the Cabul winds, their shadows to where the old cantonments lay, and tipping with fire the conical hill that overhangs the distant city, while Denzil, who had been dozing uneasily on his hard native bed, was looking with a haggard eye about him, he saw Rose seated near, at an open window, on a low divan, dressed in a most becoming

fashion, and consequently looking much more like her former self.

And as his bed, in the usual Afghan fashion, lay simply on the floor, which had no covering but a *satringee*, or piece of cotton carpet, he could see the whole of her handsome figure, as she reclined a cheek upon her dimpled hand, showing one lovely taper arm bare to the white elbow, while alternately idling over the pages of a European book and furtively watching him, as he had slept, lulled over by the drowsy hum of myriad insects at the open casement, and among the brilliantly flowered creepers that clambered round it, a sound like the murmur of distant water, or of the wind in an ocean shell, but very suggestive of heat, of lassitude, and repose ; yet Denzil, though he had slept, felt more weary than ever.

"Rose," said he, faintly.

"Dear Denzil—you are awake again, my poor pet ; you sleep but by snatches," said the girl, closing her book and sinking on her knees beside his pillow, which, with ready and gentle hands, she noiselessly rearranged.

"I have been thinking, Rose—that—that—" he paused.

"What ? Do not exert yourself."

"That my presence must be full of peril to you !"

"To me—how ?"

"This illness may be an infectious one."

"I scarcely think so, Denzil ; and if it were," she added, with a smile of inexpressible tenderness, "if it were—what then ?"

"It might seize on you, darling Rose. Let one of those Kussil-bash fellows attend me ; their lives are of no consequence, while yours—"

"Is of value only to myself."

"And to me, Rose—to me ; how unkind !"

He raised himself feebly on his elbow, and gazed at her with eyes expressive of love and admiration.

"Why, Rose, how well you are looking this evening—quite a belle, too, or a 'swell,' if one may speak slang," said he, with affected cheerfulness.

"And you, too, Denzil," said she in the same manner, kindly assumed, but with an arrested sob in her throat, for she saw that in reality he was more and more wasted, hollow-cheeked, and large-eyed than ever, and that the tendons of his hands stood sharply out in ridges, distinct to the eye, quite like those of an old man.

His full, deep, dark blue eyes had in them an unnatural lustre ; his fair, curly hair had the same golden tint as usual, when the falling sunlight touched it ; but the Indian brown and the jolly English bloom had left his once-rounded cheeks together, and

they were now pale and hollow indeed ; and though he was very fair, and his mother had been dark in eye and jetty in tress, something in his face and expression recalled her now to Rose's memory, as she had seen her on that day, when she and Mabel had visited the villa at Porthellick, and in the vanity of the hour flattered themselves that they had condescended mightily in so doing. Could they then have foreseen the present time and circumstances?

She gazed at him with great sadness, and great love, too, in her eyes and in her heart ; while he, in turn, looked up to her with love and admiration too, and with somewhat of anxiety for her future.

She was attired so prettily and suitably ; for the season was summer, and the month was June.

No longer hanging dishevelled in the Afghan fashion, the splendid ripples of her bright auburn hair were coiled up by her own clever fingers in the European mode, and smoothly braided, as she was wont to have them in happier times, showing all the contour of her fine head, her slender neck, and delicate ears. She wore a simple loose dress of white muslin, spotted with the tiniest of red rose-buds ; and through the delicate texture of this fabric the curved outline of her shoulders and her tapered arms could be traced, whiter than the gauzy muslin itself—a piquant species of costume, which made old Shireen stroke his beard and mutter, "*Barikillah!*" (excellent !), as expressive of great satisfaction, not unmixed with more admiration than the Khanum relished.

Rose was destitute of all ornaments, for everything she once possessed of that kind had long since been lost or taken from her. Her feet were cased in tight silk stockings and beautiful little kid boots, laced up in front, and they peeped from amid a wilderness of white-edged petticoats, that lay wreath upon wreath like the leaves of a rose in full bloom ; and, altogether, she was such a figure as Denzil had not seen since the jovial days when he and Bob Waller had smoked the calumet of peace together in the old cantonments, and were wont to promenade at the band-stand which stood in the centre thereof ; certainly she was quite unlike what one might expect to see in the residence of the Khan of the Kussilbashes, where the ideas of the middle ages, and darker epochs still, have not passed away, and things are pretty much as they were in the days of Timour the Tartar.

Rose seemed intuitively to read something of all this in the expression of Denzil's face ; for she smiled, and, with one of her old coquettish glances, kissed the tips of her fingers to him.

Circumstanced as they were, Rose, no doubt, in time past had talked a great deal of nonsense, and, seeing how necessary she was to Denzil's happiness, Shireen Khan had relinquished much

of her society at chess in his favour ; but who ever scrutinises very closely all that a pretty girl talks about, or what male listener, or lover especially, would care to analyse the logic thereof? The parting of charming lips is ever pleasant to look upon, and the music of a sweet English female voice is ever pleasant to hear, and never so sweet or so seductive as when far away from home. And so thought Denzil, as he lay upon his pillow, with heavy eye, with aching temples, and throbbing pulses, listening to the prattle of Rose Trecarrel.

Some books, picked up in the burned cantonments, had also been brought to Rose by the Khan, though he suggested that the Koran, with its hundred and fourteen chapters, ought to suffice for all the literary, legal, and medical necessities of mankind, and womankind too. Among those stray volumes was a copy of "Lalla Rookh," with poor Harry Burgoyne's autograph on the fly-leaf, and with this she had read Denzil asleep, reading steadily on afterwards, and kindly fearing to stop, lest by doing so she might awake him ; but now, without her ceasing, he had restlessly stirred and roused himself.

He grudged, even by necessary sleep, to lose by day a moment of her society ; for they could converse silently, eye with eye, without speaking ; for to lovers there is a dear companionship, an eloquence even, in silence ; and now the girl gazed upon her care with her eyes and her heart full of love and tenderness, all the more that he, by perfect isolation, was so completely her own, and that she could minister unto him, as only a woman, a loving and tender one, can tend and minister to the suffering.

It was very strange, all this !

To Rose Trecarrel it had seemed as if, once upon a time, the world was quite running over with lovers. Now, her world was, oddly enough, narrowed to the boundary wall and grassy fausse-braye of Shireen Khan's fort. That a girl, in her extreme youth, chances to have been, like Rose, a flirt, is no proof that she is incapable of a very deep and enduring affection ; it is often quite the contrary, and Rose was just a case in point. Here, with her and Denzil, the pretty biter was bitten. "A flirt," says one, who wrote long ago, "is merely a girl of more than common beauty and amiability, just hovering on the verge which separates childhood from womanhood. She is just awakening to a sense of her power, and finds an innocent pleasure in the exercise of it. The blissful consciousness parts her ripe lips with prouder breath, kindles her moist eyes with richer lustre, and gives additional buoyancy and swan-like grace to all her motions. She looks for homage at the hands of every man who approaches her, and richly does she repay him with rosy smiles and sparkling glances. There is no passion in all this."

It is the first trembling, unconscious existence of that sentiment which will become love in time. And Rose's time had come !

So had it been with her, though her flirtations had bordered too often on actual coquetry, thereby overacting the flirt, incurring the sneers of the piqued, and accusations of heartlessness and vanity, as one who loved the love-making, but *not* the lover. She had now become a veritable Undine—the type of everything that is amiable and beautiful, tender and true, in her sex. Yet we are constrained to admit that much of this sudden change *might* have been brought about by the dire pressure of unforeseen events and calamities. In her late term of bitter experiences, she, and all about her, had learned palpably, that those they loved most on earth were merely mortal, and might be, or had been, torn from them by cruel and sudden deaths.

In her new phase of life, how completely her former had passed away—been forgotten, with its balls, parties, picnics, déjeuners, and promenades ; its selection of dresses and colours, flowers and perfumes ; its promenades and drives ; its fun and jollity ; its gossips, flirtations, and folly ! All existence seemed merged or narrowed now in two circles or hopes—the health of Denzil, and their mutual restoration to liberty and safety !

All her girlish foibles had passed away, and the genuine woman came to the surface, when perhaps too late ; for Denzil seemed too surely to be sinking fast, and unwittingly, when his mind wandered in the delirium of fever, he murmured things that he had heard amid the banter of the mess-bungalow, and elsewhere, that stung her repentant heart, and drew tears from her eyes.

"Rose—oh Rose," he would say, "it can't be true all that Jack Polwhele said, and Harry Burgoyne, of the 37th, too—but they are dead, poor fellows !—and Grahame, and Ravelstoke, and ever so many more."

"What did they say, Denzil?"

"That you flirted with them all—oh, no, no, no ! And then there is my cousin Audley—if indeed he *is* my cousin," he added, through his chattering teeth, "he cannot love you as I love you ! He must have made a fool of many a girl in his time, while I—I love but you—even as I told you on that day by the lake, when you—you said—what did *she* say?—ask her, Sybil," he would add, looking up vacantly, yet earnestly ; and then the conscience of the listener would be stirred to find that her thoughtless follies were remembered at such a time.

"In his soul, he doubts me still," she thought. "My poor Denzil, I was only flirting, as most girls do. It was only fun," she added, aloud.

"Yes, I am *poor*, and junior in rank, I know," he replied,

catching a new idea from her words, "too poor for her to love me, Sybil ; I heard her tell that fellow, Audley, so ; and he—ah ! he is the heir of Lord Lamorna !"

"Denzil, dearest Denzil !" then Rose exclaimed, in a low and earnest whisper, putting an arm caressingly round his neck, and her tremulous lips close to his ear, "you are certain to have been promoted by this time, and doubtless the Queen will give you the Order of the Dooranee Empire, I feel sure of it," she added, little knowing that all this had already taken place.

But, at the moment she spoke, an access of fever and weakness came over poor Denzil ; his bloodshot eyes moved, but he made no response ; and a fear began to come over her that he was passing away—slipping from her love and her care—perhaps already far beyond caring now either for promotion or "a ribbon at the breast."

How she repented the past pangs her heedlessness had cost this honest heart we need not say ; but as her eyes fell on a verse of "Lalla Rookh," under-lined in some old flirtation of Burgoynes, she applied it to herself ; for now

"Far other feelings love hath brought ;
Her soul all flame, her brow all sadness ;
She now has but the one dear thought,
And thinks that o'er almost to madness."

On one occasion he became almost insensible ; but whether he slept or had swooned, she knew not in her despair of heart ; and none of Shireen's household could aid her, by advice or otherwise. At dressing a sabre cut with myrrh, or stanching a bullet-hole with a bunch of nettle-leaves as a styptic, any of them would have been ready and skilful enough ; but with such an ailment as that of Denzil, they were as useless as children, and apt to attribute it to magic, or the spell of some unseen and offended genii ; while, as fatalists, they were disposed to commit the event to God alone.

So the sorrow and apprehension of the lonely girl grew daily greater.

"And this is the only man I ever loved ; yet through me, or my sister's cause—through *us*—has death, perhaps, come untimely upon him !" Rose would say, wildly and passionately, and in a low concentrated voice, as she flung herself at the foot of Denzil's bed ; while all the horror of anticipated loneliness, if he should be taken away, and she left, came upon her. How bitterly now she felt punished for all the little follies of the past !

His ailment was, certainly, one under which a patient may linger a long time—nay, may seem to get well, and then again be worse than ever, but which, in the end, too often slays. Hence, it is no wonder that the humble Hakeem, Abu Malec—who

believed that a verse of the Koran written, washed off, and swallowed with reverence, must form a sovereign remedy, even for an obstinate and benighted infidel—should stroke his beard in sore perplexity and great wonder, and mutter—

“Thus it is that Allah seals the heart of those who are steeped in ignorance ! Their doctrines are as a worthless tree, the roots of which run on the surface of the ground, and hath no stability, and the blast of heaven will overturn.”

“A tiresome old pump ! For Heaven’s sake, keep him away, Rose !” would be the comment of the sick subaltern.

And the latter had at times a secret presentiment that he would never leave the fort of Shireen Khan alive ! yet the conviction was sweet that Rose had loved him, ere he passed away. She would never forget him now : he felt sure of that. She might love *another* in time ; but would that matter to him ? To die, ere she was restored to the society and protection of Europeans, was to leave her most lonely and widowed in heart, and was his keenest affliction ; yet he kept it to himself, having no desire to distress her unnecessarily, though his ravings sometimes indicated the prevailing thought, and the fear he saw was in her.

“I don’t think I shall die this bout, Rose darling. I cannot have a very deadly fever ! I rode only forty miles—twenty to Loghur, and twenty back—on Shireen’s old brute of a Tartar horse, and smoked about ten cheroots ; but they were execrable—picked up among the lost luggage ; and—and you know, dear mother, they are thorough disinfectants any way. Oh, no—I can’t have a deadly fever. I shall soon be better, dear, dear mother !”

Thus, Rose would learn that his wandering thoughts had flashed far, far from her, till the clouds that oppressed his brain would pass away, and, all ignorant of past delirium, he would welcome her presence with loving yet forced smiles, and seek to assure her, in a voice that grew more husky and more weak daily, “that he was better—oh, so very much better ;” adding, “Ah, if we had but Sybil here—or, rather, if we did but know what has become of her !”

“Sybil—ah, would that I could but know of her ! But she shall be my sister, Denzil ; for too surely, I fear, we shall never see Mabel more !”

“Don’t say so, You and Mabel shall both be happy, I hope, long, long after—” he paused.

“After what, darling ?”

“After all these sorrows have passed away,” said he ; and though it was not thus he had meant to close the sentence, Rose read his secret meaning in his mournful eyes.

There were times when he lay quiet, breathing hard and

shortly, but quite apathetic to all around him ; and other times when he moaned and muttered of his broken and desolate home—a home now no more ; of Cornwall, its moors and cliffs ; of wanderings in Italy—the peaks of the Abruzzi and the banks of the Arno ; of his parents and sister ; of Rose—ever and anon it was Rose, and the day by the Lake of Istaniff ; all oddly confused together, till the listener's heart was crushed, and she prayed on her knees, with bowed head, that he might be spared for her, or that, while her unfeigned kisses were pressed upon his brow and cheek, she too might catch the same fever, and that they might die and be buried together under the green turf, outside the Afghan fort, where the acacia-trees were tossing their light feathery foliage in the wind.

So thus would the sleepless hours of many a weary night of watching pass away ; the boom of brass cannon, mellowed by distance, would come from the far-off Bala Hissar, indicating that dawn was breaking, and pale Rose Trecarrel would know that the slow lingering hours of another day of heartless sorrow were before her.

One noon, however, a little hope dawned in her breast ! The Hakeem, Abu Malec, arrived with a stranger, whose fair European face belied his Afghan camise and brown leather boots.

"A Feringhee doctor Sahib has come from Cabul," said Abu Malec, not without a spice of professional jealousy in his tone, while, to the infinite joy of Rose, he introduced Doctor C_____, of the 54th Infantry, one of those gallant and devoted medical officers, who volunteered by lot cast on the drum-head to remain behind in that place of peril, and attend to the wants of our sick and wounded soldiers ; so now she devoutly hoped that Denzil would have some better treatment than that which resulted from mere superstition and a dogged belief in that fatalism which is eminently Mohammedan.

The doctor, an old friend, greeted Rose kindly, and with genuine warmth—to exist was cause for congratulation then ; next he turned to Denzil, and, after a brief examination, shook his head despondingly, to the intense satisfaction of the Hakeem, Abu Malec.



CHAPTER LXVIII.

SINCE that ill-omened hour and time of dread excitement, when on the disastrous day in January the ladies and other hostages were handed over to Ackbar Khan, their friends and relatives

even in Afghanistan knew nothing of their actual safety—who were living, who were dead, or who were mutilated or disgraced by insults worse than death, on the route towards Toorkistan ; and now the beginning of September had come.

It was only known that Ackbar's orders to Saleh Mohammed were, “to hurry them on their journey, and to butcher all the sick, and those for whom there might be no speedy conveyance.”

Eight months—eight weary and harassing months of eager longing, of fierce excitement, and impatience to avenge the fallen and rescue the helpless—had passed ere the junction between General Pollock's troops and those of Sir Robert Sale was fully effected, and the advance upon Cabul, so long resolved upon, was once more begun, while Nott was pushing victoriously from Candahar on the same point, leaving Ghuznee in smoking ruins behind him.

To Waller's mind, Mabel, though an ever-prevailing thought, had become a kind of myth by that time—existent, yet non-existent, for separation was a species of living death ; and he could but pray that she was still living, though in the hands of Ackbar Khan. So a sad memory to many a husband was the face of his wife ; so to many a father were the voice and smile of his child ; and all knew that on their own swords, and the valour and resolution of their comrades, depended the chance of their all being ever reunited again.

Waller looked older than he was wont to do—older than his years ; for he had become, like many others serving there, more grave and more thoughtful now. Fun and merriment were unknown in Pollock's army, and laughter, like many another luxury, was as scarce. With haversacks, canteens, and purses empty, and hard fighting in front, life looks far from rosy. Waller had more than once detected a most decided and long grey hair in his carefully cultivated whiskers. A grey hair!—when improvising the back of his hunting-watch as a mirror : his own elaborate rosewood dressing-case, with silver-mounted essence bottles—the parting gift of a rich aunt, from whom Bob had “expectations,” was now degraded to the duty of holding cooking-spices and stuffs for pillaus and kabobs in the kitchen of a Khan ; but the grey hairs—once upon a time he should have twitched them out.

“ Bah ! what do they matter now ?” said he, and finished his toilet by clasping on his waist-belt.

Waller felt more than ever, from personal causes, inspired by an ardour in the performance of his duty, and speedily became distinguished as one of the most active and gallant officers on the staff of Sir Robert Sale, a veteran whose uninterrupted

career of service dated back to the battle of Malavelly, where Harris defeated Tippoo Saib, and the storming of Seringapatam, in the closing year of the preceding century. Sale commanded one division in our Army of Vengeance,—for such it deemed itself; General M'Caskill, a stern and resolute Scotsman, led the other; and the whole under General Pollock, on being reinforced by Her Majesty's 31st, the 33rd Native Light Infantry, the 1st Light Cavalry, all clad in silver grey, and a train of mountain guns (the ghalondazees of which wore picturesque Oriental dresses), commenced the march towards the mighty range of mountains that lie between Jellalabad and Cabul.

M'Caskill was in such feeble health that the brave old fellow had to proceed at the head of his division in a litter borne by four Hindoos.

Experience had taught our leaders the mistake of having the usual mighty encumbrances of camp-followers, the tenting and feeding of which formed the curse of our Indian armies; so, in this instance, such appendages were greatly reduced. For tents, the palls or little marquees of the sepoys were substituted. Save a single change of linen, the soldiers carried nothing in their knapsacks; the baggage of the officers was cut down to the smallest extent—Waller carried his in a valise at his saddle—and three or four had to sleep under one marquee. All the sick and wounded were left under a guard in Jellalabad; and thus the army was trimmed, pruned, and fined down to the active, well-armed, and lightly accoutred fighting-men alone.

Hence the camp had no longer the aspect usually presented by those of our Indian forces, as these usually exhibit a motley collection of coverings, to ward off the baleful dews of night or the scorching sun by day. Here and there a superb suite of tents or marquees, surrounded by squalid little erections of coloured calico, tattered cloths and blankets stretched over sticks and poles, even palm leaves being improvised when they could be had; and amid all these congeries of variously coloured masses, the flags of chiefs and colonels, the bells of arms, horses, oxen, camels, and elephants, pell mell!

A final act of individual cruelty, perpetrated by Ackbar Khan on a poor Hindoo—the same schroff, or banker, whom Mabel had seen in Cabul—greatly exasperated all ranks against him.

Hearing that our troops had begun their march, this man, whose nationality and sympathies led him to favour their interests, when making his way towards them, was overtaken, and brought before Ackbar in the castle of Buddeeabad, and was there bitterly upbraided as a traitor.

“Throw him down,” he cried to his Haozir-bashes, and then drew his sabre.

Believing he was about to be beheaded, the wretched Hindoo implored mercy.

"Hold him fast," said Ackbar, baring his right arm to the elbow. "What, dog of an idolater, you wish to see the Feringhees, do you?"

By two blows of his heavy sabre, which was inscribed by a verse from the Koran, he hacked off the feet of the Hindoo above the ankles, and said mockingly—

"Now you may go where you will : throw him out of doors."

Cast forth, faint and bleeding, the poor wretch tore his turban-cloth into strips and staunched with them the hemorrhage, enabling him actually to crawl on his hands and knees to our outposts, where his appearance excited the bitterest feelings in the breasts of all the troops, European as well as native.

Rumour stated that Ackbar Khan was filled with alarm and rage, either of which might prompt him to execute some of his terrible threats on the helpless hostages ; and that he was prepared for any extremity, and to lay the land waste, was evinced by the alarming noises that were heard in the Passes, ere our march began, and by the sky above the mountain-tops being nightly reddened by the blaze of burning villages which he destroyed, so that neither food nor shelter might be found by an advancing foe.

At the hill of Gundamuck, where there is a walled village surrounded by groves of cypresses, Waller saw, with some emotions of interest, the cave in which he lurked after the last fatal stand was made there, and vividly came back to memory the despair of the final struggle.

As our troops began to penetrate into the recesses of those mountains, whose names and features were calculated to inspire mournful thoughts in all who looked on them (for there had a British army marched *in*, never more to come forth, being literally swallowed up), they found, as before, the ferocious Ghilzies again in position, and in thousands ready to defend their native rocks with all their native ardour, inflamed by past triumph, the hopes of future plunder, by fanaticism and pleasant doses of bhang ; and from steep to steep, and from ridge to ridge, from tree to tree, and hill to hill, they defended themselves, and fought or died with stubborn and resolute bravery, harassing our troops in front, in rear, and on both flanks. Yet on pushed our columns : the dying and the dead fell fast, and remained a ghastly train to mark the rearward route ; but every life lost seemed but to add to the pluck and hardihood of the survivors.

The sputtering fire of the long juzails, concentrating to a roar at times, filled all these savage defiles with countless and incé-

sant puffs of white smoke, that started from among the grey impending rocks, where the great yellow gourds, the purple grapes, and the scarlet creepers grew in wild luxuriance, from dark and cavernous fissures and the green groves of the pine and the plane tree. Every beetling crag was fringed with curling smoke and streaked with fire, scaring the mountain eagles high into mid air, while with every shot that helped to thin our ranks the shrill cry of *Allah Ackbar!* (God is mighty) was echoed from side to side, to die upward, yet, we hoped, to find no echo in heaven.

A little way within the eastern entrance to the series of defiles, at the village of Jugdulluck, where the mountains are between five and six thousand feet above the sea's level, there was a peculiarly fierce encounter ; for there the Afghans, led by the Arab Hadji Abdallah Osman, and inflamed to religious fury by his precepts and mad example, had fortified the summit of the pass by earthworks and some of our own captured cannon ; but, mounting the steep heights on each side, the 9th and 13th Regiments turned the flank of their position, and by the bayonet drove away the defenders amid terrible slaughter, neither side asking or hoping for quarter.

From point to point at other places were fierce contests ; and now, as our soldiers opened up with the cold steel those passes which had been closed to all Europeans for the past eight months, their onward march—a series of prolonged conflicts, in fact—exhibited to them an awful and harrowing scene.



CHAPTER LXIX.

THE BATTLE OF TIZEEN.

FROM out of the passes, dark and shadowing, the reverberating echoes of the adverse musketry roused black clouds of vultures, with angry croak and flapping wing. It would seem almost as if all the obscene birds of Asia had been wont to seek, for months past, this ghastly place—to make it their undisturbed rendezvous ; and such, no doubt, it had been, for there,

"Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown,"

all belted and accoutréed in the rags of their uniform, just as the death-shots had struck them down, and as they had fallen over each other in piles, lay the remains of Elphinstone's slaughtered army.

Close in ranks, as when living, in some places lay the ghastly

relics of the dead. In one spot, where the last stand had been made by Her Majesty's 44th Regiment, more than two hundred skeletons lay in one horrid hecatomb ; and in the shreds of red cloth that flapped in the wind, the buttons and badges, sad and agonizing were the efforts made by officers and men to recognise the remains of some dear and jovial friend, some true and gallant comrade in the times that were gone ; and it was all the sadder to reflect that most of the fallen had been cut off in their prime, or even before it, as from eighteen to twenty-six years is the average age of our soldiers on service.

In too many, if not nearly all, instances the remains were headless, the skulls having been borne off as trophies by the various mountain tribes ; and in some places the white bones lay amid purple, crimson, and golden beds of those sweetly scented violets which the Orientals so often use to flavour their finest sherbets.

For miles upon miles it was but a sad repetition of whitening bones, fragments of uniforms, and ammunition paper, bleached by the wind and rain and the snows of the past winter, together with the shrunken remains of camels, horses, and yaboos, from which the baggage and other trappings had long since been carried off ; and ever and always in mid air the croaking and flapping of the ravening vultures, long unused to be disturbed by the living, in that valley of solitude and silence, death and desolation.

Like many others, with a swollen heart, set lips, and stern eyes, Waller reined in his horse, and would look round him from time to time, in places where the dead lay thicker than usual. Our now victorious army was marching in thousands over their fallen comrades, yet with them Waller felt himself *alone*, and a man possessed by one harassing thought.

His comrades were lying among those bones, through which the rank dog-grass was sprouting—the companions of many a pleasant hour, the sharers of many a past danger. The object of the loving, the gentle, the tender, and the peaceful in England far away lay there, abandoned skeletons, exposed to the elements, to whiten and decay like the fallen branches of the forest.

Orderly and quiet at all times, a deeper silence fell upon our advancing troops as they traversed this terrible scene, a silence broken only by the dropping fire maintained by our advanced guard with the enemy's rear, under Amen Oollah Khan, till the leading brigade of the first division on the road from Khoord Cabul to Tizeen began to ascend the shoulder of a vast green mountain, named the Huft Kothul, where the narrow and tortuous pathway reaches its greatest altitude, rising above even the white mists of the deep and dark green valleys.

Even there, a portion of the path is overlooked by the Castle of Buddeeabad, which has a frontage of nearly eighty feet, and walls so lofty that the mountaineers attributed its erection, of course, to the genii, under Jan Ben Jan, who ruled the world before Adam came. It belonged to the father-in-law of Ackbar Khan, a Ghilzie chief; and there had the unfortunate old General Elphinstone looked his last upon the setting sun.

Under the immediate directions of Ackbar and of Amen Oollah, the Afghans, particularly the Kyberees, in their yellow turbans, the Ghilzies, and others, were in vast force, and they poured down such a storm of bullets from rock and bank, cleft and fissure, that the whole air seemed alive with the hissing sound, as they passed over and, too often fatally, through our ranks.

"Thirteenth Light Infantry to the right!—Second Queen's to the left—extend!" were the instant orders of Sir Robert Sale to Waller and his other aide-de-camp or secretary, Sir Richmond Shakespere, a gallant and enterprising officer, of whom more anon; and away they galloped to have them executed. Waller rode, like most of the cavalry men, with a bundle of green corn over his horse's flanks, to serve alike as provender and to keep off the flies; but, as he spurred on to the head of the 13th Regiment, a shot from a jingaul tore it away, and scattered it to the wind. By the bad gunnery of the Afghans, their cannon-balls ricocheted in a way that would have delighted Marshal Vauban, who originally invented that mode of rendering a round shot doubly dangerous, a half-charge causing it to roll, rebound, maim, kill, and cause more disorder than if fired point blank; and hence the origin of the name, as *ricochet* signifies simply "duck and drake," the name given by boys to the bounding of a flat stone cast horizontally on the water.

The two aides delivered their orders in safety to the advancing battalions, and the commander of each gave his orders for "three companies on the right (it was the left for the 13th) to extend from the centre." Cheerily rang out the Kentish bugles, and away went the skirmishers, confident in their supports, with wonderful rapidity, though the men were falling fast on every hand. They spread over the green sunny slopes to the right and left, firing as they proceeded upward, and swept over the hills in beautiful order, till the central gorge was passed; then closing in by companies, and then in line, each regiment began to fix bayonets, and mutually to utter that hearty "hurrah!" which is ever the inspiring prelude to a charge of British troops.

Brightly flashed the ridge of bayonets in the sunshine, as on right and left the red battalions came wheeling down the grassy slopes at a resolute and steady double. The Afghans, though

armed with bayonets too, never waited to cross them, but turned and fled, with howls of rage and terror, abandoning two English pieces of artillery.

Then rang out the trumpets sharp and shrill, and giving the reins to their horses, the 3rd Light Dragoons, all in blue uniform, with white puggerees over their shakos, their long, straight sword-blades flashing and uplifted, their heads stooped, their teeth set with energy, and every bronzed face flushed with ardour, spurred on their way ; and as they rushed past at racing speed, Bob Waller, impelled by an irresistible impulse, joined them. It was, indeed, a race to be the first in the task of vengeance ; for here and there, unchecked and unrestrained, the privates, if better mounted, would dart in front of the officers, as the true English emulous spirit broke out, each seeking madly to outride his comrades, and be passed by none—so on swept our Light Dragoons like a living flood.

Right and left the trenchant sword-blades went flashing downward in the sun, only to be uplifted for another cut or thrust, the blood-drops flying from them in the air.

In the scattered conflict—for such it became, when the ranks of the charging cavalry were broken open and loose, every file acting in the slaughter independently for himself, and keeping but a slight eye on the motions of his squadron leader—Waller's attention was attracted by a horseman who seemed to be in high authority, and whose figure, arms, and equipment were not unfamiliar to his eye. The Afghan was undoubtedly a brave fellow, and splendidly mounted on a spirited horse, the saddle and trappings of which were elaborately embossed and tasselled with gold, while at his martingale were four long flying tassels of white hair taken from the tails of wild oxen. He had on his left arm a small round shield, adorned by four silver knobs ; a dagger was in his teeth, and in his right hand a long and brightly headed lance, with which he had succeeded in unhorsing and pinning more than one of the 3rd Light Dragoons to the earth. He was just in the act of cruelly repassing this weapon through one who had fallen on his face, and who, in his dying agony, was tearing up the turf with his hands and feet, when both Waller and Shakespere rode at him simultaneously, and sword in hand.

From the writhing and convulsed body he extricated his spear with difficulty, and turned furiously to face them, glancing and pointing it at each alternately. He wore a steel cap, engraved with gold ; a sliding bar through the front peak, fixed there with a screw, protected his face ; and in the knob that held his plume—a heron's tuft—there gleamed a precious stone of great value.

For an instant, quick as lightning, he relinquished his lance, letting it drop in the sling behind, while he drew a pistol from his

scarlet silk girdle, and firing it at Shakespere, he hurled it dexterously at Waller, who ducked as it whizzed over his head. Recognising now, however, with whom he had to deal, he cried, fearlessly and confidently—

“ Shakespere, as a favour, leave this fellow to me, and, with God’s help, I shall polish him off as he deserves !”

“ Shumsheer-bu-dust ! (come on, sword in hand). Dog ! thy soul shall be under the devil’s jaw to-night !” cried the Afghan with fierce defiance, as his horse curveted and pranced.

He was Ameen Oollah Khan, and a splendid and picturesque figure he presented in his brightly coloured and flaming dress, through the openings of which his shirt and sleeves of the finest chain-mail, bright as silver or frostwork on a winter branch, were visible, and, as Waller knew, impervious to the swords used in our service ; at the same time he remembered that his pistols had both been discharged, and were still unloaded.

Shakespere reined back his horse, ready, if necessary, to second Waller, to whom he handed a pistol, on the Khan firing a second at him. Thus armed, Waller took a steady aim and fired straight at the head of his antagonist. The latter, to save himself, by a sharp use of the spur and curb, made his horse rear up, so that the bullet entered the throat and spine of the animal, which toppled forward with its head between its knees, just as Ameen Oollah was coming to the charge with his lance, the point of which, by the downward sinking of his horse, entered the turf so deeply, that, by the consequent breaking of the shaft, he found himself tumbled ignominiously in a heap from his saddle, and at the mercy of Waller, who, dashing at him, rained blow after blow, without avail, upon his steel cap and mailed shoulders.

The sabre of Ameen Oollah had been broken in some previous conflict ; he had but one weapon left, the long and deadly Afghan knife, which, as a last resort, he had clenched in his teeth, and with this, while uttering a hoarse cry of rage and defiance, mingled with a rancorous malediction, he rushed at Waller, and strove to drag him from his saddle, spitting at him like a viper the while, and adding, exultingly,

“ Ha !—your women are away to Toorkistan, to be the slaves of the Toorkomans—their slaves of the right hand !”

Waller, a finished horseman, was not to be easily dislodged, for he had twice the bulk and strength of his adversary. Twisting the reins round his left arm, he grasped the wrist of the hand which held the menacing knife, and by a single blow of his sword across the fingers, compelled the Khan to drop it. Heavy curses came from his lips, but never once the word *umaun* (quarter) ; he knew it would be useless, and he disdained to ask it. No thought of mercy had Waller in his heart, for he knew that if defeated he

should have met with none ; and on this man's hands there might be, for all he knew, the blood of Mabel Trecarrel, perhaps, of others certainly, and such surmises, at such a time, were maddening.

Barehanded now, the Afghan struggled like a tiger with his powerful adversary, whom he strove to unhorse. Waller endeavoured again and again to run him through the body ; but the Sheffield blade bent, and failed to pierce the fine rings of the Oriental shirt of mail, so to end the affair, he smote the Khan repeatedly on the face with the hilt of his sword, but the helmet bar protected him ; then, by making his horse rear, he endeavoured to cast him off, or kick him under foot.

Stunned and confused, the savage Afghan at last sank downward, and by some mischance got his head into the stirrup-leather of Waller, whose left foot was unavoidably pressed upon his throat ; and as the horse, terrified by this unusual appendage, plunged wildly and swerved round and round, the wretched Khan was speedily strangled, and sank into a state of insensibility, from which he never recovered, as a couple of the 13th passed their fixed bayonets through his body, and one tore off his beautiful steel cap, from which Waller afterwards obtained the jewel—a sapphire of great value.

The cap itself, which was studded with those turquoises that are found in the mountains of Nishapur, in Khorassan, he tossed to the two soldiers, who proceeded at once to poke them out with their bayonets.

"If I ever meet my Mabel again, this sapphire shall be a gift for her!" thought Waller, with a sigh of weariness, for his victory brought neither triumph nor regret to his heart.

It was afterwards remembered, as a curious instance of retributive justice, that Ameen Oollah Khan should die in the battle of Tizeen, almost by the same death as that to which he put his luckless elder brother, that he might succeed to his inheritance—strangulation.

The whole affair occupied only a few minutes ; but long ere it was over, the cavalry had swept far in pursuit, and Waller found himself almost alone. On one side was savage terror ; on the other, civilized men thirsty for justice and vengeance ; and so on all sides the turbanned hordes were stricken down by those who felt that to them was left the task of atoning for the betrayal and death of friends, comrades, and relatives ; and there, on the heights of Tizeen, the standard of Ackbar Khan was trod in the dust, never to rise again !

Once more the sun went down in blood upon the passes of the Khyberrees ; but once again they were open, and the way to Cabul was clear.

Resistance had ceased ; scarcely a single juzail shot was fired next day, when, after halting for the night, our infantry began their march beyond Tizeen, traversing, as the despatch has it, "those frightful ravines, now doubly frightful because of the heaps of dead bodies with which the narrow way was choked."

Another junction was made with the victorious troops of General Nott, advancing from Candahar and Ghuznee ; and once more the green and lovely valley of Cabul, bounded by the snow-clad peaks of Kohistan, and threaded by its blue and winding river, came into view beyond the black rocky gorges of the Siah Sung ; and the morning sun shone red and brightly on leaden dome and marble minar, on the walls of the city, and the vast castellated masses of the Bala Hissar. The uncased colours of horse and foot, European and Native, rustling in silk and embroidery, were given to the pleasant breeze ; the fixed bayonets in long lines came like a stream of glittering steel out of the dark mountain passes ; the bands struck up, and once again the merry British drums woke the same echoes that, ages upon ages ago, had replied to the clarions of the conquering Emperor Baber, of Mohammed, of Ghuznee, and even of Alexander and his bare-kneed Macedonians.

But still where were the captive hostages—the women and children ?



CHAPTER LXX.

THE pen of Scott would have failed to describe, and the pencil of Gustave Doré to depict, the anguish of the poor hostages, when, at the behest of Ackbar, and at the very time the long prayed-for succour was coming, they were compelled to set out on their sorrowful journey towards the Land of Desert.

"Oh, my poor children—my helpless lambs—my fatherless little ones !" one would cry, folding in her loving arms her scared, pale, and half-starved brood, gathering them to her while they were yet *her own*, "even as a hen gathereth her chickens."

"My husband—my husband ! shall we never meet again ?"

"My poor 'Bob,' or 'Bill,' or, it might be, 'Tom,'" some soldier's wife would exclaim, "I shall never see the likes of you more, darling ;" for though Tom perhaps drank all his pay, and gave Biddy now and then a "taste of his buff belt," he "was an angel, compared to a naygur, anyhow !"

But the majority of the hostages were ladies, and some of them were like Lady Macnaghten and Sir Robert Sale's daughter,

who were widows—who had lost alike husband and children, and mourned as those only mourn who have no hope. And now many a quaint pet name, known best in the nursery and to the playfulness of the loving heart, was mingled with the most solemn of prayers.

“Death—death were better than this!” would be the despairing cry of some ; and, ere their sad journey ended, death came to more than one of that devoted band.

For in one or two instances, despite the piteous entreaties of the ladies, some soldiers—those very men whom the 13th had subscribed their rupees at the drum-head to ransom—whose weakness from wounds or bodily illness rendered them incapable of riding or marching were shot by the wayside, and left unburied, even as so many lamed horses or diseased dogs which were useless might have been. One or two, who were weary of life, entreated to have it ended thus, and all whom the Dooranees destroyed thus in obedience to Ackbar’s orders and the grim law, perhaps, of necessity, died peacefully and piously—sick of their present existence, and hopeful of the future ; but the women screamed, lamented, and prayed, seeking to muffle their ears when the death-shots rang in the mountain wilderness.

Mabel Trecarrel was weak and ailing too, but she was much too valuable a species of commodity to be shot out of hand, like a poor Feringhee soldier, even though quite as much a Kaffir and infidel as he might be ; so she was tenderly borne in a palanquin which had been found in the cantonments, and which contained every comfort and appliance for travelling—little drawers for holding clothes or food, and even a mirror, though she never looked at it.

Like a few more, she was silent in her grief, and found a refuge in tears.

The wedded wife might utter loudly and despairingly the name of her husband, and the parent that of the dead or absent child, finding a relief for the overcharged heart in sound ; but, even in that terrible time, the poor betrothed girl could only whisper, in the inmost recesses of her breast, of the lover she never more might see, and gaze backward with haggard eyes on the features of the landscape with which they had both become familiar—the hills of Beymaru, the ridges of the Black Rocks, and the smiling valley of Cabul, as they all lessened and faded away in the distance, while slowly but surely, under a watchful and most unscrupulous guard, the train of prisoners, on active Tartar horses or plodding Afghan yaboos, in swinging dhooleys and curtained litters of other kinds, wound among the mountains on their way to Toorkistan, the frontiers of which were only about a week’s journey distant.

And what was the prospect before them ?

Separation and distribution, to be bartered for horses, or sold into slavery and degradation ; the few men among them, irrespective of rank, to be the bondsmen, syces, carpet-spreaders, and grooms, hewers of wood and drawers of water : the women, if young, to be the veriest slaves of ignorant and unlettered masters, as yet unseen and unknown ; if old, to become nurses and drudges to the women of the Usbec Tartars : and all these were Christians, and civilised subjects of the Queen ; many of them accomplished, highly bred, nobly born, and tenderly nurtured.

Terrible were the emotions of the English mother, who, circumstanced thus, looked on her pure and innocent daughters and thought of what a week might bring forth !

Yet such were the fates before them—the fates that even the quickest marching of our troops might fail to avert ; for were not the Afghans, as they heard, again disputing every inch of the passes with a desperation which proved that Lord Auckland's policy, and that of the " peace at any price party " at home, would never have availed with those who deemed diplomacy but cowardly cunning, treaties as trash, bribes as fair " loot," and all war as legal fraud ?

The lamentations of the women at times, when mingled and united (for grief is very infectious), roused even the usually phlegmatic Saleh Mohammed, who rode in the centre of the caravan, perched between the humps of a very high camel.

" In the land to which you are going, of course, you shall find neither Jinnistan, the Country of Delight, nor its capital, the City of Precious Stones ; neither will fruits and sweet cakes drop into your mouths, as if you sat under the blessed tree of Toaba, which is watered by the rivers of paradise," said he, half scoffingly ; " but you will see the vast sandy waste of the Kirghisian desert, which to the thirsty looks like a silvery sea in the distance ; and some of you may happily see the city of Souzak, which contains five hundred houses of stone, and I doubt if the Queen of the Feringhees has so many in her little island. Barikillah ! and you will see the black tents and the fleecy flocks of the Usbec Tartars, for they are numerous as leaves in the vale of Cashmere."

And thus he sought to console them when, on the evening of the first day's journey, they halted at Killi-Hadji, on the Ghuzznee road (only seven miles westward from Cabul), and so called from the killi, or fort of mud that guards its cluster of huts. It was approached by narrow and tortuous lanes overhung by shady mulberry-trees ; and there, beside the walls of the fort, they bivouacked for the night.

The deep crimson glory of sunset was over ; but the flush of the western sky lengthened far the purple shadows of tree, and rock, and hut, even of the tall camels, ere they knelt to rest, across the scene of the bivouac, which was not without its strong aspect of the quaint and picturesque, albeit the sad eyes of those who looked thereon were sick of such elements, as being associated with all their most unmerited miseries.

Unbitted, with leather tobrahs, or nose-bags filled with barley, hanging from their heads, the patient horses were eating, while the hardier yaboos grazed the long grass that grew in the lanes and waste places.

Fires were lighted, and around them all of the Dooranee guard, who were not posted in the chain of sentinels, sat cross-legged, smoking hempseed, cleaning their arms, fixing fresh flints or dry matches to their musket-locks ; others were industriously picking out of their furred poshtees those active insects of the genus *pulex*, called by the Arabians "the father of leapers," while the flesh of a camel, which had been shot by the way, as useless—its feet being wounded and sore—sputtered and broiled on the embers for supper, and the light from the flames fell in strong gleams and patches on the strange equipment, the swarthy turbanned faces, and gleaming eyes of those wild fellows, whose shawl-girdles bristled with arms and powder-flasks, and some four hundred of whom were furnished with muskets and bayonets.

A spear stuck upright in the earth—its sharp point glittering like a tiny red star—indicated the head-quarters, where, muffled in his poshteen and ample chogah, with a piece of thick xummul folded under him, Saleh Mohammed Khan, propped against the saddle of his camel, prepared, with pipe in mouth, to dose away the hours of the short August night

Most, if not nearly all, the lady captives, wore now, of necessity, the Afghan travelling-dress, a large sheet shrouding the entire form, having a *bourkha*, or veil of white muslin, furnished with two holes to peep through ; and with those who, muffled thus, sat in kujawurs, or camel-litters, the semblance of their orientalism was complete.

From time to time, dried branches or cass—a prickly furze grass which grows in bunches—were cast upon the fire, causing the flames to shoot up anew, on the pale faces of the prisoners and the dark faces of their guards, till at last the embers died out and the white ashes alone remained ; and such was the scene which, like a species of phantasmagoria, met the eyes of Mabel Trecarrel, when, in the still watches of the night, she drew back the curtains of her palanquin and looked forth occasionally. But the stars began to pale in the sky ; its blue gave

place to opal tints ; the sun arose, and after the Mohammedans had said their prayers with their faces towards Mecca, and the Christians with their eyes bent towards the earth or to heaven, once more the heartless march was resumed, in the same order as on the preceding day, through a pass in the mountains, and from thence across the beautiful valley of Maidan.

Saleh Mohammed, though a Khan, having once been a Subadar in Captain Hopkins's Afghan Levy (from which he had deserted to the party of Ackbar Khan, at the beginning of the troubles), had some ideas of military order and show : thus he had at the head of the caravan—for it resembled nothing else—six Hindostanees, furnished with some of our drums and bugles gleaned up in the Khyber Pass, and with these they made the most horrible noises for several miles at the commencement and close of each day's march ; but even this medley of discordant sounds failed to extract the faintest smile from the hostages—even from Major Pottinger and the few soldiers—so sunk were they in heart and spirit now.

In the Maidan valley they rode between fields of golden grain bordered by towering poplars and pale willows. Bare, bleak-looking mountains undulated in the distance, and the poor ladies eyed them wistfully.

Were these the borders of dreaded Toorkistan ?

They proved, however, to be only a portion of the Indian Caucasus, the extremity of which, the Koh-i-baba, a snow-clad peak, rises to the height of sixteen thousand feet above the level of the Indian Sea.

That night Saleh Mohammed chose a pleasant halting-place for them, influenced by some sudden emotion of pity. There they were supplied with plums, wild cherries, peaches, and the white apricot which has the flavour of rose water. But ere morning there was an alarm ; a confused discharge of musketry was fired in every direction at random, all round the bivouac ; one or two bullets whistled through it. A dhooley-wallah was shot dead, and several red arrows, barbed and bearded, stuck quivering in the turf ; yells were heard and then a furious galloping of horses passing swiftly away in the distance.

It was a *chupuo*—a night attack planned by some of the Hazarees, a wild and independent Tartar tribe, whose thatched huts lie sunk and unseen on the hill slopes, and on whose confines they had halted. They are all good archers, and though armed with the matchlock, usually prefer the bow.

They are bitter foes of the Afghans, and had hoped, by making a dash, to cut off some of their prisoners ; but Saleh Mohammed was too wary for them, and on that evening had doubled his guards ere the sun went down.

The 2nd of September found the train traversing the Kalco Mountain, one in height only inferior to the Koh-i-baba. From thence, over a vast chaos of wild and terrific hilly peaks that spread beneath them like the pointed waves of a petrified sea, they could view, at last, and afar off, the plains of Toorkistan—the land of their future bondage ; and anew the wail of grief and woe rose from them at the sight.

The following day, that the absurd might not be wanting amid their misery, to the surprise of all, Saleh Mohammed appeared mounted on his camel, not in his usual amplitude of turban, with his flowing chogah and Cashmere shawls, but with his lean, shrunken, and bony figure buttoned up in a tight regimental blue surtout, with gold shoulder-scales, and crimson sash, frog-belt, and sword, all of which had whilom belonged to Jack Polwhele, of the Cornish Light Infantry, a tiny forage cap (which Jack used to wear very much over his right ear) being perched on the back of his bald head, while the chin-strap came uncomfortably only below the tip of his high hooked nose ; and thus arrayed he prepared to meet and, as he hoped, duly to impress Zoolficar Khan, the governor of the town of Bameean, where the first halt was to be made for further and final orders from Ackbar, as to whether the hostages should be sold or slain ; for now their custodian began to have some strange doubts upon the subject, and now his victims were fairly out of Afghanistan and in the land of the Tartars, nine days of monotonous and arduous journey distant from Cabul.

We have lately seen the kind of mercy meted out to helpless hostages by Communal savages in the boasted city of Paris—the self-styled centre of civilization—and so may fairly tremble for the fate of those who were in the hands of Asiatic fanatics on the western slopes of the Hindoo-Kush.



CHAPTER LXXI.

MABEL'S PRESENTIMENT.

MABEL TRECARREL seemed to see or to feel the image of Waller become more vividly impressed upon her mind, now, as every day's journey, as every hour, and every mile towards the deserts of Great Tartary, increased the perils of her own situation, and seemed to add to the difficulties, if not entirely to close all the chances, of their ever meeting again on this earth ; and as Bameean, a rock-hewn city, the Thebes of the East, and geographically situated in Persia, began to rise before the caravan

when it wound down from the Akrobat Pass, a deeper chill fell on her heart, for she had a solemn presentiment creeping over her that *there* all her sorrows, if not those of her companions, too, should be ended.

A laborious progress of several miles, during which her now weary dhooley-wallahs staggered and reeled with fatigue, brought them from the mountain slopes into a plain, damp, muddy, and marshy, where from the plashy soil there rose a mist through which the city seemed to shimmer and loom, shadowy and ghost-like. A great portion of this plain was waste, and hence believed to be the abode of ghouls, afreets, and demons, who, in the dark and twilight, sought to allure the children of Adam to unknown but terrible doom.

A gust of wind careering over the waste from the pass, rolled away, like a veil of gauze, the shroud which had half concealed the place they were approaching ; and with a mournful and sickly interest, not unmixed with anticipated dread, Mabel and her friends surveyed the city of Bameean.

Rising terrace over terrace on the green acclivities of an insulated mountain, the bolder features and details shining in the ruddy sunlight, the intermediate spaces sunk in sombre shadow, it exhibited a series of the most wonderfully excavated mansions, temples, and ornamental caverns (the abodes of its ancient and nameless inhabitants), to the number of more than twelve thousand, covering a slope of eight miles in extent.

Many of those rock-hewn edifices, carved out of the living stone which supports the mountain, and are the chief portions of its foundation and structure, have beautiful friezes and entablatures, domes and cupolas, with elaborately arched doors and windows. Others are mere dens and caverns, with square air-holes ; but towering over all are many colossal figures, more particularly two—a woman one hundred and twenty feet high, and another of a man, forty feet *higher*—all hewn out of the face of a lofty cliff.

By what race, or when, those mighty and wondrous works of art were formed, at such vast labour, no human record, not even a tradition, remains to tell ; their origin is shrouded by a veil of mystery, like that of the ruined cities of Yucatan ; so whether they are relics of Buddhism, or were hewn in the third century, during the dynasty of the Sassanides, has nothing to do with our story. But the poor hostages, as they were conveyed past those silent, dark, and empty temples, abandoned now to the jackal, the serpent, and the flying fox, with the towering and gigantic apparitions of the stone colossi looking grimly down in silence, felt strange emotions of chilly awe come over them—the ladies especially. To Mabel Trecarrel, in her weak and nervous state,

the scene proved too much ; she became hysterical, and wept and laughed at the same moment, to the great perplexity of Saleh Mohammed, who was quite unused to such exhibitions among the ladies of *his* zenanah.

Though stormed by Jenghiz Khan and his hordes, in 1220, after a vigorous resistance, this rock-hewn city, by its materials and massiveness, could suffer little ; yet it was subsequently deserted by all its inhabitants, who named it "Maublig," or the *unfortunate*. After that time, its history sank into utter obscurity; its once fertile plain reverted to a desert state once more ; yet unchanged as when Bameean was in its zenith, its river of the same name flows past the caverned mountain, on its silent way to the snowy wastes where its waters mingle with those of the Oxus.

In this remote place the captives were all, as usual, enclosed in a walled fort which contained a few hovels of mud, where in darkness and damp they strove to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted, with blankets, xummuls, and the saddles on which they had ridden.

The Dooranees of Saleh Mohammed had to keep sure watch and ward there, for the Usbec Tartars are the predominating people, and, though divided into many tribes, they are all rigid Soonees, with but small favour for the Afghans ; and the prisoners soon learned that the unusual costume of Saleh Mohammed, instead of inspiring Zoolficar Khan, as he had expected, with wonder, only excited in that sturdy Toorkoman an emotion of contempt, that a Mussulman should so far degrade himself by adopting, even for a day, the dress of a Feringhee—a Kaffir ; and they had something approaching to hasty words on the subject, when, on the first evening of their meeting, those dignitaries sat together on the same carpet under a date tree in the garden of the fort, while slaves supplied them with hot coffee, wheat pillau, pipes, and tobacco.

There, too, had Mabel been borne on a pallet, by the express permission of the Khan, that she might enjoy the sunshine ; there was, he knew, no chance of her attempting to escape ; and to prevent any covetous Toorkoman from playing tricks with the tender wares entrusted to him, he had a double chain of sentinels with loaded muskets planted round them, as Zoolficar Khan could perceive when reconnoitring the place, which was outside the city of Bameean, but immediately under the shadow of its temples and rock-hewn giants ; for Zoolficar, having learned that Saleh Mohammed was proceeding towards the deserts with the captives to sell, to punish the men of their tribe for interference in the affairs of Afghanistan, was not indisposed to have the first selection from among them, and had resolved to look over "the lot" with a purchaser's eye.

He had already, over their pipes and coffee, broached the subject to Saleh Mohammed ; but the latter, undecided in everything, save that he had to halt where he was for fresh orders from the Sirdir, Ackbar Khan, would not as yet listen to any proposals for selling or bartering, and eventually dozed off asleep, with the amber mouthpiece of the bubble-bubble in his mouth, leaving Zoolficar Khan to amuse himself as best he might.

Mabel, weary and faint with her long journey of nine consecutive days, though borne easily and carefully enough in a palanquin, lay listlessly and drowsily pillow'd on her pallet, under the cool and pleasant shade of an acacia tree. Near her stood a tiny pagoda of white marble, carved as minutely and elaborately as a Chinese ivory puzzle ; and before it was a tank wherein were floating some of the beautiful red lotus, the flowers of which far exceed in size and beauty those of the ordinary water-lily.

The slender, drooping, and fibrous branches of the acacia tree, so graceful in their forms and so tender in their texture, cast a partial shadow over her, and, as they moved slowly to and fro in the soft evening wind, by their rocking or oscillating motion predisposed her to slumber ; and so, ere long, she slept, but slept only to dream of the past—the happy, happy past, for keenly did she and all who were with her realise now that “it is the eternal looking-back in this world that forms the staple of all our misery.”

Anon, she dreamed of the monotonous swinging of her palanquin, and the doggrel songs by which the poor half-nude bearers sought to beguile their toil and cheer the mountain way ; now it was of Waller, with his fair English face, his handsome winning eyes, and frank, jovial manner, retorting some of the banter of Polwhele or Burgoyne. She was at her piano ; he was hanging over her as of old, and their whispers mingled, though fears suggested that the horrible Quasimodo, the Khond, with his cat-like moustaches and mouth that resembled a red gash, was concealed somewhere close by ; then she heard cries and shots—they were attacked by Hazarees, Ghazees, Ghilzies, or some other dark-coloured wretches ; and with a little scream she started and awoke, to find that her veil had been rudely withdrawn—uplifted, in fact—in the hand of a man who stood under the acacia tree, and had been leisurely surveying her in her sleep with eyes expressive of inspection and satisfaction.

She shuddered, and a low cry of fear escaped her ; for she knew by the cast of his face, by his air and equipment, that the stranger was a Toorkoman—the *first* who had come—by his

unwelcome presence bringing fresh perils, as she knew, to all the English ladies ; yet he was a handsome fellow, not much over five-and-twenty, and so like Zohrab Zubberdust in aspect and bearing, that they might have passed for brothers.

Mabel feebly struggled into a sitting posture, and snatching her veil from his hand, looked steadily, perhaps a little defiantly, at Zoolficar Khan ; for he it was who, when his older host dozed off, to dream of plunder and paradise, had proceeded to make a reconnaissance of whatever might be seen of the prisoners and their guards ; for it might yet suit his interests or his fancy to cut off the whole caravan in a night or so. Thus, a few paces from where Saleh Mohammed was sleeping in the sunshine had brought him unexpectedly on Mabel !

He was a dashing fellow, whose dress was not the least remarkable thing about him. His trowsers, of ample dimensions, were of bright blue cloth, very baggy, and thrust into short yellow boots ; he had on three collarless jackets, all of different hues, and richly fringed and laced ; a large turban of silk of every colour, with a white heron's plume, to indicate that he was a chief ; a shawl girdle, with sword, dagger, and long-barrelled awkward Turkish pistols stuck therein, completed his attire. His keen, sharp Tartar features, though suggestive of good humour by their general expression, were not, however, without much of cunning, rakish insolence, and the bold effrontery incident to a lawless state of society, a knowledge of power, and much of contempt or indifference for the feelings of others. He looked every inch one of those wild

"Toorkomans, countless as their flocks, led forth
From th' aromatic pastures of the north ;
Wild warriors of the Turquoise hills, and those
Who dwell beyond the everlasting snows
Of Hindoo Koosh, in stormy freedom bred,
Their fort the rock, their camp the torrent's bed !"

He simply gave the scared Mabel a smile, full of confidence and saucy meaning, and then turned away, leaving her a prey to emotions of fear—a fear that might have been all the greater had she heard what passed between him and Saleh Mohammed at the time when she, trembling in heart and feeble in limb, crept back to the ladies' huts to tell them, with lips blanched by terror, that "the first Toorkoman had come!"

And stronger than ever grew her presentiment within her.

The craving to hear of the movements of the three British armies which they knew to be still in Afghanistan was strong as ever in the hearts of the captives—to hear the last, ere a barrier rose between them and their past life ; and that barrier seemed now to be the mighty chain of Hindoo Koosh rising between

them and the way to India and to home. Long had they hoped against hope. Nott, and Pollock, and Sale—where were they and their soldiers? What were they doing? For the Dooranees would tell nothing. Had they and their forces been destroyed in detail, even as Elphinstone's had been? Those yells and noisy discharges of musketry, in which the captors at times indulged in honour of alleged victories over the three Kaffir Sirdirs, on tidings brought by wandering hadjis, filthy faquires, and dancing dervishes, could they be justified? Alas! fate seemed to have done its worst!

Surmises were become threadbare; invention was worn out. Each of the poor captives had striven, by suggestions of probabilities and by efforts of imagination, to flatter themselves and buoy up the hearts of others; but all seemed at an end now.



CHAPTER LXXII.

THE GOVERNOR OF BAMEEAN.

WAKING up Saleh Mohammed without much ceremony, the young Toorkoman chief proceeded to business at once, but in a very cunning way, commencing with another subject, like a wily lawyer seeking to lure and throw a witness off his guard.

"After a nine days' journey, Khan, you must be short of provisions?" said he.

"Oh, fear not for our presence here in Bameean," replied Saleh Mohammed, leisurely sucking at his hubble-bubble, the light of which had gone out; "every tobrah full of oats, every maund of ottah and rice, we require shall be duly paid for."

"You mistake me; I did not mean that."

"What then? Bismillah! we are rich: the spoil of the Kaffir dogs who come to Cabul has made us happy."

Zoolfcar's almond-shaped eyes glistened with covetousness on hearing this: He reflected: the Dooranees were not quite five hundred strong, and he could bring a thousand Tartar horsemen into the field; hence, why might not all this plunder so freely spoken of, and these slaves, two of whom he had seen (and they were so white and handsome), be his?

"You propose to remain here for some days, aga?" he resumed, seating himself cross-legged, and playing with the silken tassel of his sabre.

"Yes."

"Waiting for orders from Ackbar Khan?"

"Yes."

"His final firmaun, I think you said?"

"Yes."

"To advance or retire?"

"Yes."

"If he has proved signally victorious?" queried Zoolficar sharply, as he grew impatient of these mere affirmatives, which were resorted to by the other merely to give him time to think and sift the other's purpose.

"Wallah billah—victorious."

"Yes—which, under Allah, we cannot doubt?"

"Well, aga."

"Then his orders will be to sell these hostages, I suppose?"

"Yes—perhaps."

"Where, Khan?—here in Bameean?"

"No; they will bring larger prices nearer Bokhara."

"But if he is *not* victorious?" suggested Zoolficar.

"Staferillah! Then we must leave the event to fate; or my orders may be—" and here even Saleh Mohammed paused ere he made the atrocious admission that hovered on his tongue.

"What—what?"

"To behead them. Ackbar has sworn that none should live to tell the tale of those who came up the Khyber Pass; and I must own that his sparing these surprised me."

There was a pause, after which the Governor of Bameean said—

"And when may you expect those final orders?"

"Or tidings, let us call them."

"Well, well, aga, this is playing with words."

"Tidings that shall guide me may come without orders," replied Saleh Mohammed, glancing at the green flag of Ackbar which was flying on the fort, and then half closing his eyes to watch the other keenly, and as if to read in his face the drift of all these questions. "You surely take a deep interest in these Kaffirs, Zoolficar Khan?" he added.

"I take an interest, at least, in two whom I have seen—in one particularly."

"The Hindoo ayah in the red garment?" suggested Saleh, pointing with the amber mouthpiece of his pipe to an old nurse who was passing with two of the captive children.

"The devil—no! One who is beautiful as the rose with the hundred leaves—one with a skin as fair as if she had bathed in the waters of Cashmere; an idol more lovely than ever adorned the house of Azor! She was under yonder tree asleep, when I lifted her veil and looked on her."

"Allah Ackbar—now we have it," exclaimed Saleh Mohammed, with something between irritation and amusement. "Well,

know, aga, that to quote a Parsee or Hindoo banker's book in lieu of Hafiz might be more to the purpose."

"Perhaps so : we have more metal in our scabbards than in our purses in the desert here."

"They have tempers, these Feringhee women, I can tell you," said the Dooranee, with a quiet laugh.

"So have ours, for the matter of that, and are free enough with their slipper heel on a man's beard at times."

"Ah ! all women, I dare say, are like the apples of Istkahar, one half sweet and one half sour," said the old Khan, shaking his long beard.

"You must seek the well of youth again," rejoined the young Toorkoman, laughing. "There is another Kaffir damsel whose voice sounded sweetly, as if she had tasted of the leaves that shadow the tomb of Tan-Sien," he continued, using in his ordinary conversation figures and phraseology that seem no way far-fetched to an Oriental ; "yes, aga, tender and soft, for I heard her sing her two children to sleep in yonder hut. Yet she may never have been in Gwalior," added Zoolficar ; for the lady was an officer's widow, young and pretty, with two poor sickly babes ; and the *tomb* he referred to was that of the famous musician, who once flourished at the court of the Emperor Ackbar, and the leaves of a tree near which are supposed to impart, when eaten, a wondrous melody to the human voice.

"Then am I to understand that you have set eyes upon both these prisoners?" asked Saleh Mohammed, his keen black eyes becoming very round, as he seemed to make up more fully to the matter in hand.

"Please God, I have. In a word," said Zoolficar Khan, lowering his voice, "I shall give you a purse of five hundred tomauns for them both—peaceably, and help you to plunder the Hazarees on your way home."

"And what of the Sirdir?"

"Tell him they died on the way : moreover, I don't want the two children—you may keep them."

This liberality failed to find any approbation in Saleh Mohammed, who affected to look indignant, and exclaimed—

"I am Saleh Mohammed Khan, chief of the Dooranees, and *not* a slave-dealer, staferillah !—God forbid !"

"Neither is Ackbar Khan—a son of the royal house of Afghanistan ; yet he has sent hither those people for sale, in *your* charge—for sale to the Toorkomans ; and what am I?"

"I have no final orders—as yet," replied the Khan, doggedly.

"For their disposal, you mean?"

"No."

"For what, then?"

"Simply to halt here ; to act peaceably, but watchfully, Zoolfifar Khan—*watchfully*," replied the other in a pointed manner ; "and hourly now I may expect a cossid with a firmaun from Cabul."

"The Hazarees are in arms in your rear, and, ere your cossid comes, there may be a chupao in the night, and the fort may be looted."

"By them, or your people?"

"Nay, I said not mine, aga."

"But you thought it," was the blunt response.

"Who, save Allah, may pretend to know what another man thinks?"

"Well, we are prepared alike to protect ourselves and to keep or slay ; yea—for it may come to that—to slay, root and branch, those Kaffir hostages. I would not betray my trust were you Kedar Khan with all his wealth!" continued Saleh Mohammed, flushing red, and speaking as earnestly as if he really felt all he said, while referring to that ancient king of Toorkistan, whose fabled riches were so great, that when on the march he had always before him seven hundred horsemen with battle-axes of silver, and the same number behind with battle-axes of gold.

So far as slaughter was concerned, if that sequel were necessary, Zoolfifar Khan felt sure that Saleh Mohammed would keep his word ; and he was about to retire partially baffled, with his mind full of visions for securing the plunder by a midnight attack on the Dooranees, either while in the fort or when on the march ; and he was casting a furtive glance to where he had last seen Mabel, combining it with a low salaam to his host, when, ere he could take his leave, a strange figure on a foam-covered yaboo rode furiously into the fort and dismounted before them. He was almost nude ; his lean body, reduced to bone and brawn, was powdered with sandal-wood ashes ; his hair hung in vast volume over his back and shoulders ; his only garment was a pair of goat-skin breeches ; a gourd for water hung by a strap over his shoulder, and this, together with a long Afghan knife, a large wooden rosary of ninety-nine beads, and a knotted staff, completed his equipment.

"Lah-allah-mahmoud-resoul-Allah!" he yelled, flourishing the staff as he sprang from his shaggy yaboo.

"We know that well enough, Osman Abdallah," said the Dooranee chief, impatiently, to the Arab Hadji, for it was he who came thus suddenly, like a flash of lightning ; but from whence come you?"

"Cabul ; or the mountains near it, rather."

"To me?"

"Yes, Khan, with a message from the Sirdir," replied this

fierce, wild, ubiquitous being, whose skin bore yet the scarcely healed marks of Waller's sword-thrust, as he drew from his girdle a sorely soiled scrap of paper, and bowed his head reverentially over it ; for the bearer of a letter from such a personage as the Prince Ackbar must treat the document with as much respect as if he himself were present.

"And what of the Sirdir?" asked Saleh, starting forward.

"Allah kerim; he has been defeated by the Kaffir's dogs at Tizeen—routed by Pollock Sahib—totally!"

"Silence, fool!" cried the Dooranee, with a swift, fierce glance at the Toorkoman, as he snatched from the hands of the Hadji, and without a word of greeting or thanks, the little scroll, and then opened it deliberately and slowly, as if the disposal of a flock of sheep were the matter in hand, and not the lives or deaths, the captivity or liberty, of so many helpless human beings. The missive contained but three words, and the seal of Ackbar—

"March to Kooloom."

And Zoolfcar Khan, who peeped over his shoulder without ceremony, had read it too. The beetle brows of Saleh Mohammed were close over his fiery eyes, as he said haughtily—

"Where is this place? I may ask, as you have read the name."

"Kooloom—it is a steep, rugged, and perilous journey, Khan."

"And what am I to do when I get there?" asked Saleh Mohammed, ponderingly, of himself, and not of his companion.

"But you are not yet there," said the latter, in a low voice.

"How—what do you mean?"

"The way may be beset. Have I not said that it is perilous."

"Well, perhaps we shall not go," replied the other, with an unfathomable smile; and with low salaams they separated, each quite ready for and prepared to outwit the other.

One fact they had both learned : Ackbar Khan was defeated, and *not* victorious.



CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE ALARM.

"THEN you have seen the fighting against the Kaffirs, I suppose?" asked Saleh Mohammed, grimly.

"Seen! Nay, Khan, I fought against them in person; at Jugdulluck, the defence of the village was entrusted to me—"

"And lost by a Hadji," said the Khan, with a sneer.

"Yes, even as the heights of Tizeen were lost by a Khan," retorted the other.

"A Khan—who?"

"Ameen Oollah—who was killed there."

"Was the slaughter great?"

"Of the Faithful, mean you?"

"Yes : I ask not of the Kaffirs—may their white faces be confounded!"

"The slaughter might remind Azrael, and the angels who looked on us, of the Prophet when he fought at Bedr. It was not so great, of course, as that of the Feringhees when they left Cabul ; for Ackbar's orders were then, that but *one* should be left alive, if even that ; but the white smoke, as it rolled on the wind, along the green sides of the hills, and ascended skyward out of the deep, dark passes, was like that which shall precede the last day, and for two moons fill all space, from the east to the west, from the rising to the setting of the sun."

"Silence!" grumbled Saleh Mohammed, who was full of earnest thought, and in no mood for religious canting just then, as the orders of Ackbar and the collateral news of his defeat perplexed, while the hints and covert threats of the Governor of Bameean alarmed and irritated him. "So this is all you know, Hadji Osman?"

"All, save that I have a letter for Pottinger Sahib."

"From whom?" asked the chief, sharply.

"Shireen Khan, of the Kussilbashes."

"Fool ! why not speak of this before? Yet perhaps it is as well that yonder Toorkoman dog is gone," exclaimed Saleh Mohammed, as he impetuously tore the missive from the hand of the cunning Hadji, who probably knew its contents ; for a most singular leer came into his repulsive face, as he watched the dark visage of the Dooranee, seeming all the darker in the twilight now ; for the golden flush was dying in the west, and its fading light fell faintly on the rock-hewn edifices and wondrous colossi that towered on the hill-slope above the fort, one half of which was sunk in shadow.

The Arab Hadji, as his creed inculcated, loathed the infidels, but this loathing did not extend to their loot and treasures ; he was not indifferent to their wines and other good things (in secret, of course), and he loved their golden English guineas and shining rupees—their shekels and talents of silver—quite as much as any of the "cloth" (not that he indulged in that commodity), the reverend faquires, doctors, and dervishes of enlightened Feringhis-tan ; so, for a "consideration," he had actually brought a message to a "Kaffir," concerning the redemption of his companions. The letter briefly detailed the victory of General Pollock at Tizeen, placing beyond a doubt the rout of Ackbar, and his flight to Kohistan, and suggested that the Major, in his own name, and

those of five other British officers, who were prisoners with him, should offer to Saleh Mohammed the sum of twenty thousand rupees as a ransom for all—especially the ladies and children—the sum to be paid down on their release ; and a glow of triumph, satisfaction, and avarice filled the keen eyes and face of the old Dooranee as he read over the words carefully thrice ; and then stroking his mighty beard, as if making a promise to himself, and seeming already to feel the rupees loading his girdle, he exclaimed—

“ Shabash ! Allah keerim ! (Very good ! God is merciful !) The Major Sahib will act like a sensible man, and trust to my generosity. The game of Ackbar—whose dog is *he* now ?—is about played out at Cabul ; he is checkmated—has not a move on the board. So Saleh Mohammed may as well act mercifully, and treat with the Feringhee Major for the ransom of his people.”

The night was passed as usual after prayers were over, in stupor or the wonted listlessness of despair, by the captives, who were crowded all together in the mud hovels of the fort, their Dooranee guards lying outside in their chogahs, poshtees, and horse-cloths ; but in the morning they saw with surprise that a new flag—a scarlet one—had replaced the sacred green, which had floated on the outer wall at sunset.

And each asked of the other what might this portend ? It was the signal that Saleh Mohammed had revolted from the cause of Ackbar Khan ; but of what his own movements or measures were to be they knew nothing yet. This new feature in affairs bewildered and baffled the ulterior views of Zoolfcar Khan, who was still more surprised when, soon after dawn, the old Dooranee, with a detachment of his people, sallied from the fort, attacked and captured—not, however, without resistance, some sharp firing, and use of the sabre—a whole convoy of provisions which passed *en route* for Bokhara—an act of daring for which he found it difficult to account, as it would be sure to rouse the terrible Emir of that kingdom against these intruders in Toorkistan ; but doubtless, thought Zoolfcar, the Afghan must know his own plans and power best.

Loth, however, not to pick up something in the broils or forays that were so likely to ensue, he began gradually to muster his Toorkoman followers, desiring them to draw to a head in a wood near the Bameean river, about nightfall, to watch the Dooranees in the fort, and to gall or attack them either in advancing or retiring therefrom ; but, ere dark came, there occurred what was to him a fresh source of surprise, and to Saleh Mohammed of serious alarm, while it chilled with a new-born fear the hearts of the prisoners, to whom Major Pottinger had now communicated his letter, his promises and plans, with all the tidings

of the Hadji, thereby for a time exciting their wildest and most joyous anticipations (at a moment when hope had sunk to its lowest ebb) of freedom and restoration to the world : so friends were rushing to congratulate friends, and weeping with happiness, mothers were wildly clasping their children to their breast, and all were giving thanks to God.

Affecting ignorance of any change that had taken place in the mind of the Dooranee, towards evening Zoolfcar Khan in all his bravery, but alone, rode to the gate of the fort, when, greatly to his wrath, he was denied admittance by Saleh Mohammed in person.

"Take care lest you are the dupe of your own fortune," said he, haughtily.

"Covet not the goods of another, aga," responded Saleh, who had now resumed his Oriental amplitude of costume.

"Are we to understand that you have abandoned the cause of Ackbar?"

"Fate has done so—wallah billah—why should not I?"

"How now about Khedar Khan and his riches, O Saleh Mohammed the Incorruptible?" laughed the Toorkoman.

"Dare you mock me?" asked the Dooranee, scowling, with his hand on a pistol.

"No; but what means all this change since yesterday?"

"It means that what is good for me may be bad for you? Who can read the book of destiny? The same flower which gives a sweet to the bee gives poison to reptiles?"

"Does all this mean that you will neither sell nor barter?" asked Zoolfcar, shaking haughtily his huge turban and white heron's plume.

"Exactly—that I will do neither," replied the Dooranee, with a mocking laugh.

"Then, by the hand of the Prophet, there perhaps come those who may deprive you of all you possess!" exclaimed the young Toorkoman, with fierce triumph, as he pointed suddenly along the road that led towards the Akrobat Pass.

The sun, now in the west, was shedding a lovely golden light along the brilliantly green slopes of the mighty mountains, whose snow-capped peaks stood up sharply defined, cold and white, against the deep pure blue of the sky. The barren and desolate Akrobat Pass, overhung by rocks of slate and limestone, yawned like a dark fissure between the masses of the impending hills, and out of it a cloud of white dust was now seen to roll, spreading like mist, and increasing in magnitude like the vapour released by the fisherman in the Arabian story from the vase of yellow copper on the sea-shore.

On and on it came—onward and downward into the plain

where the Bameean river winds, and where the silent city of the Colossi towers upon its rock-hewn hill.

Bright points began to flash and gleam ever and anon out of this coming cloud of dust—points that could not be mistaken by a soldier's eye,—and speedily the whole advancing mass assumed the undoubted aspect of a great body of armed horsemen, whose tall spears shone like stars, as they came on at full speed from the mountains.

"Hazarees—wild Hazarees or Eimauks—by Allah!" exclaimed the Toorkoman, gathering his reins in his hands ; "a chupao—an attack on you, Saleh Mohammed! Now look to your damsels and spoil, for you will be looted of every kusira !"^{*}

With a shout of exultation and defiance, he wheeled round his horse, and galloped away towards the wood and river.

The Arab Hadji, Osman, declared these new-comers to be some Usbec cavalry, whom he had seen but yesterday encamped by the side of the river Balkh.

"Kosh gelding! Usbecs, Toorkomans, or Hazarees,—let them come and welcome; they shall not find us unprepared!" exclaimed Saleh Mohammed through his clenched teeth, while his black eyes shot fire, and he rushed away for his weapons, and, by all the horrible din that his Hindostanee drummers and buglers could make, summoned his quaint-looking followers to arms; for, in that lawless land, he knew not whose swords might be uplifted against them now, as the downfall of Ackbar would encourage all to make spoil of his adherents. Even in the kingdom of Afghanistan there were bitter quarrels, and the tribes were all divided against each other now.

In a moment the fort became a scene of the most unwonted bustle. The Dooranees are one of the bravest of the Afghan clans, and this party of them prepared to make a resolute defence, and, if necessary, to sell their lives as dearly as possible. Muskets, matchlocks, and jingalls were loaded on every hand. The gate of the fort was hastily closed and barricaded behind with earth, and an old brass 9-pounder gun, covered with Indian characters—a perilous and too probably honey-combed piece of ordnance, which was found in the place—was propped on a heap of stones, just inside the entrance, where it was loaded with bottles, nails, and other missiles, to sweep a storming party.

Meanwhile all the European male prisoners, under Major Pottinger, were now armed to make common cause with their late guards; and among them many a pale cheek flushed, and many a hollow eye lighted up once more, at the prospect of a conflict, though the weapons with which our poor fellows were

* An Afghan coin, worth about .083 of a penny, English.

armed were only quaint matchlocks, rusty tulwars, and old notched Afghan sabres.

And now, in front of the column of advancing horse, two cavaliers came galloping on at headlong speed, far before all their comrades, whose ranks were loose and confused, and all unlike Europeans ; so Salch Mohammed, his face darkened by a scowl, his eyes glistening like those of a rattlesnake, and his white beard floating on the wind, crouched behind the old and mouldering wall, adjusting with his own hands a clumsy jingall, or swivel wall-piece, with the iron one-pound shot of which he was prepared to empty the saddle of one of those two adventurous riders—he cared not a jot which.

Thus far we have followed Anglo-Indian history ; and now to resume more particularly our own narrative.



CHAPTER LXXIV.

TOO LATE !

WHEN Doctor C——, though the anxious and watchful eyes of Rose Trecarrel were bent upon him, had shaken his head so despondingly, and thereby gratified the professional spleen of the long-bearded Abu Malec, he had done so involuntarily, and from sincere medical misgivings that his aid had been summoned when too late ; and with tears in her eyes, did Rose needlessly assure him that, until she had seen him enter the sick room, she knew not of his existence, or that he had been permitted to survive.

To this he replied by taking both her hands kindly within his own, for he was a warm-hearted Scottish Highlander, and in turn assuring her that, “until brought to the fort of Shireen Khan by the Hakeem, he also had been ignorant of the vicinity of her, and her companion ; but without proper medicines,” he added, “little could be done—now especially.”

Yet she hoped much. He gave her valuable advice, and the Khanum, too, and promised to return without delay, and with certain prescriptions, made up from his little store kept in Cabul for the few wounded soldiers who were hostages there. He rode off, and Rose’s blessings and gratitude went with him. No curiosity as to the relations of the nurse and patient—peculiar though their circumstances—prompted a question from the doctor. That Rose should attend the sick officer seemed only humane and natural. Who other so suitable was nigh ? And to find one more European—a friend especially—surviving, was source of pleasure enough !

The doctor retired ; but, instead of hours, days went by, and he returned no more ; for on the very evening of his visit he was seized and despatched, with all the rest, under Saleh Mohammed, to Toorkistan. In another place the doctor was thus enabled to be of much value to Mabel Trecarrel, and *en route* towards the desert did much to alleviate her sufferings, and restore her health ; but the assurance he gave her that he had seen her sister and Denzil Devereaux too, and that they were safe—perfectly safe—in the powerful protection of Shireen Khan, did more to this end than all his prescriptions.

But his advice ultimately availed but little the patient he left behind, for Denzil grew worse—sank more and more daily ; he had but the superstition and follies or quackery of Abul Malec to interpose between him and eternity.

Terribly was Rose sensible of all this, as she sat and watched by the young man's bedside in that desolate room of the fort ; for it was intensely desolate and comfortless, an Afghan noble's ideas of luxury and splendour being inferior to those possessed by an English groom. Save the bed on which he lay, two European chairs and a trunk brought from the plunder of the cantonments, it was as destitute of furniture as the cell of a prison ; and, as if in such a cell, daily the square outline of the window was seen to fall with the yellow sunshine on the same part of the wall, and thence pass upward obliquely as the sun went round, till it faded away at the corner, and then next day it appeared again, without change.

And there sat the once-gay, bright, and heedless Rose Trecarrel, the belle of the ball, of the hunting-meet, of the race-course, and the garrison, with a choking sensation in her throat, and a clamorous fear in her heart, Denzil's hot, throbbing hand often clasped in one of hers, while the other strayed caressingly over his once-thick hair, or what remained of it, for by order of Doctor C——, she had shorn it short—shorter even than the regimental pattern ; and so would she sit, watching the winning young fellow, who loved her so well—he, whose figure might have served a sculptor for an Antinous in its perfection of form, wasting away before her, with a terrible certainty that God's hand could alone stay the event ; and whom she had but lately seen in all the full roundness of youth and health, with a face animated by a very different expression from that now shown by the hollow, wan, and hectic-like mask which lay listlessly on the pillow—listlessly save when his eyes met hers, and then they filled or grew moist with tenderness and gratitude, emotions that were not unmixed by a fear that the pest, if such it was, that preyed on him might fasten next on her. Then *who* should watch over Rose, as she had watched over him, like a sister or a mother ?

His head, in consequence of the blow he had received from the pistol-butt of the fallen Afghān—the wretch he had sought to succour in the Kyber Pass—was doubtless the seat of some secret injury ; for not unfrequently he placed his hand thereon and sighed heavily, while a dimness would overspread his sight, and there came over him a faintness from which Rose, by the use of a fan and some cooling essences—the Khanum had plenty of them—would seek to revive him, and again his loving eyes would look into hers.

"Ah, you know me again," she would say, in a low soft voice, and with a smile of affected cheerfulness ; "you are to be spared to me, after all, Denzil—we shall live and die together."

"Nay—not die together, Rose : don't say die together, darling."

"Why?"

"That would be too early—for you, at least."

"You deem me less prepared than yourself, Denzil. Perhaps I am ; yet what have I to live for now?"

"Do not talk so, Rose."

"God will take pity on us, Denzil, and will make you well and whole yet," she would reply, and kiss the aching head that rested on her kind and tender bosom ; and with all the young girl's love, something of the emotion almost of maternal care and protection stole into her heart, as she watched him thus ; he clung to her so, and was so gentle and so helpless.

"If—if—after this" (he did not say, "after I am gone," lest he should pain her even by words)—"if, Rose, after all this, you should ever meet my sister—my dear little Sybil—you will tell her of me—talk to her about me, talk of all I endured, and be a sister to her, for my sake—won't you, Rose?"

"I will, Denzil—I *shall*, please God."

"Oh yes—yes ; one who has been so good to me, could not fail to be good to her, and to love her for her own sake—for mine perhaps."

And then Denzil would look half vacantly, half wildly up to the ceiling, and marvel hopefully yet apprehensively in his heart where was now that homeless sister, so loved and petted at Porthellick, and whom we last saw crouching by the old cottage door near the stone avenue, on that morning when her mother died, and when the cold grey mist was rolling from the purple moorland along the green slopes of the Row Tor and Bron Welli.

Alas ! her story Denzil knew not, and might never, never, know it.

But he was beginning now to know and to *feel* that "the God who was but a dim and awful abstraction before" seemed very close and nigh. No fear was in his heart, however : he was

very calm and courageous, save when he thought of Rose's future, and how lonely and lost she should be when he was gone. This reflection alone brought tears from him ; it wrung his heart, and made him the more keenly desire to live.

No Bible or Book of Common Prayer had Rose wherewith to console either the sufferer or herself ; all such had gone at the plunder of the cantonments and the baggage, and had likely figured as cartridge paper at Jugdulluck and Tizeen ; but no printed or hackneyed formulæ could equal in depth or earnestness the silent yet heartfelt prayers she put up for Denzil and herself.

"My poor Denzil—poor boy ! I never deserved that you should love me so much : I have thought so a thousand times !" Rose would whisper fervently, and, heedless of any danger from fever, and perhaps courting it, place his brow caressingly in her neck, and kiss his temples, as if he were a child, telling him to "take courage, and have no fear."

"Fear ! why should I fear death, Rose?" he would respond, speaking quickly, yet with difficulty—speaking thus perhaps to accustom himself to the topic, or to accustom her, we know not which ; "why should I fear death, since I know not what it is ? Why fear that which no human being can avert or avoid, and which so many better, braver, and nobler than I have so lately proved and tested in yonder Passes ?—aye, Rose, my mother too, at home—my father on the sea—Sybil perhaps—all !"

Then his utterance became incoherent, his voice broken, and Rose felt as if her heart were broken too ; for when he spoke thus, there spread over his young face a wondrous brightness, a great calm ; and the girl held her breath, in fear, if not awe, for she read there an expression of peace that denoted the end was near.

All was very still in the great square Afghan fort and in the Khan's garden without.

The summer sun shone brightly, and the birds, but chiefly the melodious pagoda-thrush—the king of the Indian feathered choristers—was there ; and the flowers, the wondrous roses of Cabul, were exhaling their sweetest perfume. There the world, nature at least, looked gay and bright and beautiful ; but here, a young life, that no human skill, prayer, or affection could detain, was ebbing away so surely as the sea ebbs from its shore, but not like the sea to return.

If Denzil died, what had she to live for ? So thought the heedless belle, the half coquette, the whole flirt, of a few months past ; but such were "the uses" or the results of adversity. Was not the end of all things nigh ? Without Denzil Devereaux and his love, so tender, passionate, and true, what would the world be ?

and her world, of late, had been so small and sad ! This love had been all in all to her ; and now all seemed nearly over, and nothing could be left to her but forlorn exile and the gloom of despair.

As there is in memory “ a species of mental long-sightedness, which, though blind to the object close beside you, can reach the blue mountains and the starry skies which lie full many a league away,” so it was with Denzil ; and now far from that bare and desolate vaulted room in the Afghan fort, from the mountains of black rock that overshadowed it, and all their harassing associations, even from the presence of the bright-haired and pale-faced girl who so lovingly watched and soothed his pillow, the mind of the young officer flashed back, as if touched by an electric wire, to his once-happy home. Again his manly father’s smile approved of some task or feat of skill performed by bridle, gun, or rod ; again his mother’s dark eyes seemed to look softly into his ; the willowed valley (that opened between steep and ruin-crowned cliffs towards the billowy Cornish sea), the little world of all his childhood’s cares and joys, was with him now, and with that world he was mingling over again in fancy, though death and distress had been there as elsewhere ; the hearth was desolate, or strangers sat around it ; their household gods were scattered, and home was home no longer, save in the heart, the memory, of the dying exile.

And so, for a time, his thoughts were far away, even from Rose and the present scene. Far from the images that were full of the warlike and perilous present, he was revelling in the past, and talked fluently, confidently, and smilingly with the absent, the lost, and the dead. Often he said—

“ Lift my head, dearest mother ; place your kind arm round my neck and kiss me once again.”

And Rose obeyed him, and he seemed to smile upward into her face ; and yet he knew her not, or saw *another* there.

Then he talked deliriously of his father’s rights, of his mother’s wrongs, and of his cousin, Audley Trevelyan, till his voice sank into whispers and anon ceased.

This was what Shakspeare describes as the

“ Vanity of sickness ! fierce extremes,
In their continuance, will not feel themselves.
Death having preyed upon the outward parts,
Leaves them invisible ; and his siege is now
Against the mind, which he pricks and wounds
With many legions of strange fantasies,
Which, in their throng and press to that last hold,
Confound themselves.”

He fell asleep ; and, without prolonging our description further,

suffice it that poor Denzil never woke again, but passed peacefully away. . . .

Rose sat for a time in a stupor, like one in a dream. Summoned by her first wild cry, the Khanum was by her side now.

Denzil, so long her care, her soul, her all, lay there, it would seem, as usual—lay there as she had seen him for many days ; yet why was it that his presence, and that rigid angularity and stillness of outline, so appalled her now ?

As the crisis so evidently had drawn near, strongly and wildly in the girl's heart came the crave for medical, for religious, for any Christian aid or advice ; but there none could be had, any more than if she had stood by the savage shores of the Albert Nyanza ; and now the dread crisis was past !

So, from time to time the pale girl found herself gazing on the paler face of the dead—of him who had so lovcd her—gazing with that mingled emotion of incredulity, wonder, and terror, awe and sorrow, which passeth all experience or description.

There was no change in the air ; there was no change in the light : one was still and calm, and laden with perfume ; the other as bright and clear as ever : and the blaze of yellow sunshine poured into the room precisely as it did an hour ago ; but now it fell on the face of the dead !

And the clear voice of the pagoda-thrush sang on ; but how monotonously now !

Rose was stunned, and sat crouching on the floor, with her face covered by her hands, her head between her knees, and her bright dishevelled hair falling forward in silky volume well nigh to her feet. Ignorant of what to say, or how to soothe grief so passionate, the Khanum, unveiled, hung over her in kindness of heart, but with one prevailing idea—that the death of an idolater must be very terrible ; that already the fiends must be contesting for the possession of his soul ; that the prescribed portion of the Koran had not been read to him ; and even if it had been, what would it avail now, till that day when the solid mountains and the soft white clouds should be rolled away together by the blast of the trumpet of Azrael ?

So his last thoughts had been of his dead mother, as Rose remembered, and not of *her*. Her father was dead ; Mabel was gone to Toorkistan, too surely beyond ransom or redemption ; oh, why was *she* left to live ?

If the *sense of exile* is so strong in the heart of the Anglo-Indian, even amid all the luxuries and splendours of Calcutta, the city of palaces—amid the gaieties and frivolities of Chowringhee,—what must that sense have been to the heart of this lonely English girl, far away beyond Peshawur, the gate of Western India, beyond the Indus, fifteen hundred English miles, as the

crow flies, "up-country," from the mouth of the Hooghley and the shore of Bengal—where the railway whistle will long be unheard, and where Murray, Cook, and Bradshaw may never yet be known !

Notwithstanding all that Rose had undergone of late, and all that she had schooled herself to anticipate as but too probable, she was still unable fully to realise the actual extent of the misfortunes that threatened her. Much of that deep misery which Sybil had endured elsewhere, when crouching in the damp and mist outside her mother's door, came over Rose's spirit now. Henceforward, she felt that life must be objectless ; that safety or pursuit, freedom or captivity, sea or land, must be all alike to her ; and for a time her poor brain, so long oppressed by successive sorrows and excitements, became almost unconscious of external impressions, and she sat as one in a dream, hearing only the buzz of the summer flies and the voice of the pagoda-thrush.

Suddenly another sound seemed to mingle with the notes of the birds ; it came on the air from a great distance. She started and looked wildly up—her once-clear hazel eyes all bloodshot and tearless now.

What was it ? what *is* it ? for the sound was there, and she seemed to hear it still, and the Khanum heard it too !

Nearer it came, and nearer.

It was the sound of drums—drums beaten in regular marching cadence, coming on the wind of evening down from the rocky pass in the hills of Siah Sung.

Oh, there could be no mistake in the measure—British troops were coming on ; and how welcome once would that sound have been to the young soldier who lay on his pallet there, and whose ear could hear the English drum no more !

She started to the window, and looked forth to the black mountains, which, though distant from it, towered high above the Kussilbashes' fort. The dark pass lay there, its shadows seeming blue rather than any other tint, as the receding rays of the setting sun left it behind ; but her eyes were dim with weeping and with watching now, so Rose, with all her pulseless eagerness, failed to see the serried bayonets, the shot-riven colours tossing in the breeze, or the moving ranks in scarlet, that showed where the victorious brigades of Pollock, Sale, and Nott were once more defiling down into the plain that led to humbled Kabul.

Welcome though their sound, they had come, alas, *too late !*

The drums were still ringing in her ears ; and this familiar sound, like the voices of old friends, caused her now to weep plentifully. Once again she turned to the bed where Denzil lay so pale and still, his sharpened features acutely defined in the last light of the sun ; and she felt in her heart as she pressed

her interlaced hands on her lips, seeking to crush down emotion—

"So the dream it is fled, and the day it is done,
And my lips still murmur the name of one
Who will never come back to me!"

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE PURSUIT.

THE same evening of this event saw the Union Jack floating on the summit of the Bala Hissar, and our troops in or around Cabul, in the narrow and once-crowded thoroughfares of which—even in the spacious and once-brilliant bazaar—the most desolate silence prevailed. The houses of Sir Alexander Burnes, of Sir William Macnaghten, and all other British residents were now mere heaps of ashes, and their once-beautiful gardens were waste. Human bones lay in some; whose they were none knew, but they remained among the parterres of flowers as terrible mementos of the past.

Having, among many other trophies, the magnificent and ancient gates of Hindoo Somnath with them, the victorious troops of General Nott were encamped around the stately marble tomb of the Emperor Baber, where the British were watering their horses at the Holy Well, quietly cooking their rations of fat-tailed dhoombás or of beef, newly shot, flayed, and cut up, after a long route; and the natives were gravely boiling their rice and otta; while the staff officers, Generals Pollock, Sale, Nott, Macaskill, and others, some on foot and some on horseback, were in deep conference about a map of Western India, and Bokhara, and as to where the hostages were, and what was to be done for their relief, if they still lived.

Waller, who in his energy and anxiety had come on with the advanced guard of cavalry, looked around him with peculiar sadness. Save Doctor Brydone and one or two others, he alone seemed to survive of all the original Cabul force; and every feature of the place before him was full of melancholy memories and suggestions of those he could never see again, and of the past that could come no more.

To Sir Richmond Shakespere, his new friend, he could not resist the temptation of speaking affectionately and regrettfully of the dead, and the places associated with them. He found a relief to his mind in doing so.

"A time may come," said he, as they sat in their saddles

twisting up cigarettes, and passing a flask of Cabul wine between them, while the syces gave each of their unbitted nags a tobrah of fresh corn, "when these passes of the Khyber Mountains may be as familiar to the English tourist as those of Glencoe and Killycrankie are now—for there was a day when even the land beyond *them* was a *terra incognita* to us ; and a time may come when the lines of railway shall extend from Lahore even to Peshawur—ay, and further—perhaps to the gates of Herat—though it may not be our luck to see it ; but I can scarcely realise that in our age of the world, an age usually so prosaic and deemed matter-of-fact, men should see and undergo all that we have undergone and seen, and in a space of time so short too !"

Would a quiet home, a peaceful life, after a happy marriage, ever be the lot of him and Mabel ? Loving her fondly and tenderly, with all the strength that separation, dread, and doubt and sorrow, could add to the secret tie between them, he had almost ceased to have visions of her associated with admonitions and prayer from a lawn-sleeved ecclesiastic ; a merry marriage breakfast ; a bride in her white bonnet and delicate laces, and smiling bridesmaids in tulle. Such day-dreams had been his at one time ; but amid rapine and slaughter, battle and suffering, they had become dim and indistinct, if not forgotten !

"Yes, Waller," replied his companion, after a pause, "a British army—we have actually seen a British army, with all its accessories and appurtenances, exterminated at one fell swoop !"

"All this place is full of peculiarly sad memories to me, Sir Richmond."

"Doubtless ; and, like me, you won't be sorry when we all turn our backs on it for ever, as we shall do soon."

"True. See ! yonder lie our cantonments, ruined walls and blackened ashes now ; beyond them are the hills where, with my company—not one man of which is now surviving, myself excepted—I scoured the fanatical Ghazees from rock to rock, and far over the Cabul river, so victoriously ! Here, by that old tomb and ruined musjid, we once had a jolly pic-nic : half the fellows in the garrison and all the ladies were there—the band of the poor 44th too. By Jove ! I can still see the scattered fragments of broken bottles and chicken bones lying among the grass."

"I have felt something of this regret when coming on the remembered scene of an old pig-sticking party or bivouac," replied Sir Richmond, with a half smile at the unwonted earnestness of Waller, who had seemed to him always a remarkably cool and self-possessed man of the world ; but he knew not the deeper cause he had for feeling in these matters. "You may say, as an old poem has it—

' Now the long tubes no longer wisdom quaff,
 Or jolly soldiers raise the jocund laugh ;
 The scene is changed, but scattered fragments tell
 Where Bacchanalian joys were wont to dwell.'

Is it not so, Waller?"

" By this road I smoked a last cigar with Jack Polwhele, of ours, and Harry Burgoyne, of the 37th," resumed Waller. He remembered, but he did not care to add, how broadly they had bantered him about Mabel Trecarrel on the evening in question. " And all round here," he resumed, pursuing his own thoughts aloud, " are the scenes of many a pleasant ride and happy drive. Here I betted and lost a box of gloves with the Trecarrels."

" You seem to have always been betting on something with those ladies, and with a gentleman's privilege of losing."

" It was on the Envoy's blood mare against Jack Polwhele's bay filly, in the race when Daly, of the 4th Dragoons, won the sword given by Shah Sujah," said Waller, colouring a little. " There, by those cypresses, I once met the sisters half fainting, one day, with heat, their palanquin placed in the shade by the gasping dhooley-wallahs; so, at the risk of a brain fever, I galloped to the Char-chowk for a flask of Persian rose-water, fans, and so forth."

" The Trecarrels again! By the way, it seems to me," said the other, " that of all the friends you have lost, those two young ladies— one especially——"

What the military secretary of General Pollock was about to say, with a somewhat meaning smile, we know not, save that he was heightening the colour of Waller's face by his pause; but a change was given to the conversation by the opportune arrival of Shireen Khan, of the Kussilbashes, mounted, as usual, on his tall camel, and accompanied by a few well-appointed horsemen. He had ascertained that " Shakespere Sahib" was the *katib*, or secretary, to the victorious Feringhee general, and had come to tender, through him, his services to the family of the fallen Shah, to the conquerors, to the Queen they served, and, generally, to the powers that were uppermost.

Many of the Afghan chiefs, who, with their people, had acted most savagely against us, were now extremely anxious to make their peace with General Pollock; and though it can scarcely be said that towards the end (after his own jealousy of Ackbar's influence, fear of his growing power that curbed all private ambition, caused a coolness in the Sirdir's cause) Shireen and his Kussilbashes had been our most bitter enemies, yet he and they were among the first now to meet and welcome the conquerors of Ackbar, against whom they had turned, not as we have seen Salch Mohammed meanly do, in the time of his undoubted

humiliation and defeat, but when in the zenith of his power ; and now this wary old fellow, who played the game of life as carefully and coolly as ever he played that of chess, knew that the protection he had afforded to Rose Trecarrel and to Denzil—the supposed Nawab—must prove his best moves on the board—his trump cards, in fact ; and as a conclusive offer of friendship, he now offered six hundred chosen Kussilbash horsemen to follow on the track of Saleh Mohammed, and rescue the *whole* of the prisoners, a duty on which Shakespere and Waller at once joyfully volunteered to accompany them.

"Shabash !" he exclaimed, stroking his beard in token of faith and promise, "punah-be-Kodah !—it is as good as done ; and the head of the Dooranee dog shall replace that of the Envoy in the Char-chowk !"

Waller soon divined that the lady now residing in Shireen's fort must be no other than the younger daughter of "the Sirdir Trecarrel," who was spirited away on the retreat through the passes on that night when the Shah's 6th Regiment deserted ; but of *who* "the Nawab" could be he had not the faintest idea, until he and Shakespere galloped there, saw the living and the dead, and heard all their sad story unravelled.

With her head, sick and aching, nestling on the broad shoulder of Bob Waller, as if he was her only and dearest brother, Rose told all her story without reserve, and it moved Waller and his companion deeply to see a handsome and once bright English girl so crushed and reduced by grief and long-suffering ; yet her case was only one of many in the history of that disastrous war. She ended by imploring them to lose no time in following the track of those who had borne off her sister and the other hostages.

No words or entreaties of hers were necessary to urge either Waller or Shakespere on this exciting path ; and instant action became all the more imperative when Shireen announced that he had sure tidings from Taj Mohammed Khan, and also from Nouradeen Lal, the farmer, who had been purchasing horses on the frontier, that all the lawless Hazarees were in arms to cut off the entire convoy ; and that if a junction were once effected between them and the Toorkomans of Zoolfcar Khan, all hope of rescue would be at an end.

The permission of the general was, of course, at once asked and accorded, and it was arranged that, immediately upon their departure, a body of cavalry and light infantry should follow with all speed to second and support them.

Kind-hearted Bob Waller waited only to attend the obsequies of his young comrade (while the Kussilbashes were preparing) ; and over these we shall hasten, though of all the Kabul army he was, perhaps, the only one interred with the honours of war ; the

battle-smoke had been the pall, the wolf and the ravens the sextons, of all the rest !

The spot chosen was a little way outside the Kussilbashes' fort, on the sunny and green grassy slope of a hill, where a grove of wild cherry-trees rendered the place pleasant to the eye. From her window Rose could alike see and hear the rapid ceremony ; for by the stern pressure of circumstances it was both brief and rapid. No prayer was said ; no service performed ; no solemn dropping of dust upon dust ; no requiem was there, but the drums as they beat the "Point of War," after the last notes of the Dead March had died away.

The quick, formal commands of the officer came distinctly to her overstrained ear, as the hurriedly constructed coffin of unblackened deal, covered by the colour of the 44th Regiment, was being lowered, as she knew, for ever, into its narrow bed ; the steel ramrods rang in the distance like silver bells, and flashed in the sunshine ; then a volley rang sharply in the air, finding a terrible echo in her heart, while the thin blue smoke eddied upward in the sunshine ; another and another succeeded, and Rose—the widowed in spirit—as she crouched on her knees, knew then that all was over, and the smoke of the last farewell volley would be curling amid the damp mould that was now to cover her lost one.

Anon the drums beat merrily as the firing party, after closing their ranks, wheeled off by sections, with bayonets fixed, and Denzil Devereaux was left alone in his solitary and unmarked grave, just as the sun set in all his evening beauty ; and a double gloom sank over the soul of Rose Trecarrel.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE HOSTAGES.

SWIFTLY rode Shakespere, Waller, and their six hundred Kussilbashes on their errand of mercy, and midnight saw them far from the mountains that look down on Cabul. Of all his five thousand horse, old Shireen had certainly chosen the flower. All these men rode their own chargers, and all were armed with lance and sword, matchlock and pistols ; all had their persons bristling with the usual number of daggers, knives, powder-flasks, and bullet-bags, in which the Afghan warrior delights to invest himself ; and all wore the peculiar cap from which they take their name—a low squat busby, of black lambs'-wool, not unlike those now worn by our Hussars, and having, like them, a bag of scarlet cloth hanging from the crown thereof.

To avoid all suspicion or attention *en route*, Waller and Shakespere had cast their uniforms aside, and rode at their head à la *Kussilbashe*, dressed in posheet and chogah, and armed with lance and sabre.

The discovery of Rose Trecarrel—an event so unexpected and unlooked for after all that had occurred—seemed to Waller as an omen of future good fortune, and his naturally buoyant spirits rose as he rode on. The expedition was full of excitement, especially for a time : it was an act of courage, mercy, and chivalry, that all Britain should eventually hear of ; and Mabel was at the bourne for which they were all bound. Even poor Denzil, so recently interred, was partially forgotten : soldiers cannot brood long over the casualties of war, especially while amid them ; and Denzil's death was only one item in a strife that had now seen nearly fifty thousand perish on both sides.

However, let it not for a moment be thought that Waller was careless of his friend's untimely end, his memory, or his strange story ; for, ere he left Rose, he had promised that as soon as he could write, or get "down country" again, one of his first acts should be to seek out and succour "this only sister" of whom poor Devereaux had always spoken so much and so affectionately.

When he parted from Rose, leaving her in the safe and more congenial protection afforded by the European camp, she had not been without one predominant fear. As friends had come too late to save or succour Denzil, they might now, perhaps, be too late to rescue Mabel and her companions from this new conjunction of enemies against them, even in Toorkistan. Besides, Ackbar the Terrible, with the ruins of his infuriated army, was to fall back on the deserts by the way of Bameean ; and thus, to avoid him, the two British officers, with their Kussilbashes, at one time made a judicious detour among the hills.

At Killi-Hadji, they found traces of the first halt made by the caravan outside the old fort, where a shepherd had, as he told them, seen the captives ; thence by the mountain pass and the fair valley of Maidan, where a Hadji, bound afoot for the shrine of Ahmed Shah at Candalhar—the scene of many a pilgrimage—told them that the risk they ran was great, as the Hazarees were undoubtedly drawing to a head in the Balkh ; and this was far from reassuring, as they were conscious of having far outridden their promised supports.

"Let us push on, for God's sake !" was ever Waller's impatient exclamation at every halt, however brief ; and even Sir Richmond Shakespere, with all his activity and energy, was at times amused by the restlessness of one who seemed by nature to be a rather quiet and easy-going Englishman.

"These are tough rations, certainly," said he, as they halted

for the last time near the Kaloo Mountain, and masticated a piece of kid broiled on a ramrod at a hasty fire (broiled ere the flesh of the shot animal had time to cool), and washed it down by a draught from the nearest stream.

"Tough, certainly ; but we get all that is good for us."

"If not more," added Shakespere, pithily ; "for this is feeding like savages—or Toorkomans, who drink the blood of their horses."

"At a halt, when marching up country, I always used, if possible, like a knowing bachelor, to tiff with a married man."

"Why?"

"You will be sure to find that he has some daintily made sandwiches, cold fowl, or so forth, in his haversack : the women, God bless them, always look after these little things. But that is all over now ; we are no longer in Hindostan. A little time must solve all this—the safety of our friends—" added Waller, looking thoughtfully to the distant landscape ; and as if repenting of a momentary lightness of heart, "I would give all I have in the world—"

"Say all you owe," suggested Shakespere, smiling.

"Well, Sir Richmond, that *would* be a round sum perhaps—to see them all within musket shot of us. As for ransom, I have but my sword at their service. I can't do even a bill on a Hindoo schroff, or raise money on a whisker, as John de Castro did at Goa ; but I can polish off a few of those savages, as they deserve to be."

The dawn of a second day saw them descending the mighty ridges of the Indian Caucasus, and a picturesque body they were, with their bright parti-coloured garments floating backward on the wind ; their black fur caps with scarlet bags, their dark keen visages and sable beards, their polished weapons and tall tasselled lances flashing in the uprisen sun, as they galloped, without much order certainly, at an easy but swinging pace, over green waste and grey rocky plateau, up one hill-side and down another, now splashing merrily, and more than girth deep, through the clear sparkling current of some brawling mountain nullah whose waters had been unbridged since Time was born—their horses light in body, with high withers, fine and muscular limbs, square foreheads, small ears, and brilliant eyes, and to all appearance full of speed, spirit, and a strength that seemed never to flag. And sooth to say, the gallant Kussilbashes took every care to preserve those qualities so desirable alike for pursuit or flight.

At every brief halt they were carefully unbitted, unsaddled, groomed, and lightly fed, and picketed in the old Indian fashion, with the V-ended heel-rope fastened round both hind fetlocks and secured to a single pin ; near cuts over the hills were taken,

but rivers were never forded nor swum, unless the horses were perfectly cool ; once or twice pieces of goat's flesh were rolled round their bridle-bits ; and hence by all this care, the cattle of the whole troop, unblown and ungalled, were in excellent order, when, on the fourth day—for their progress had been swifter than that of Saleh Mohammed, as they were unincumbered by women, children, camels, and ponies—they left the Kaloo Mountain behind, and ere long, without seeing aught of Hazarees or Toorkomans, though always prepared for them, they came in sight of Bameean, towering on its green mountain, its elaborate but silent temples and great solemn giants of stone reddened by the bright flood of light shed far across the plain by the sun, which was setting amid a sea of clouds that were all of crimson flame.

In deepest purple the shadows fell far eastward ; the gleam of arms appeared on the walls of the old fort in the foreground, when Waller and Sir Richmond Shakespere darted forward, by a vigorous use of the spur, far outstripping their less enthusiastic followers. After they had carefully reconnoitred the fort through their field-glasses, Shakespere began to rein in his horse, and check its pace.

"Waller," said he, "a red flag has replaced Ackbar's invariable green one on the fort. We had better parley."

"But we have neither trumpet nor drum."

"Nor would those fellows understand the sound of either, if we had ; but look out—pull up, or, by Heaven, we shall be fired upon ! You are rash, Waller, and in action seem quite to lose your head."

"But my hand is ever steady—ay, as if this sword were but a cricket bat," retorted Waller, whose blue eyes were sparkling with light.

"True, my dear fellow ; but to be potted now, when within arm's length of those we have risked so much to save, would be a sad mistake."

"Egad, yes ; and that old devil with his jingall—for a jingall it is—may speedily send one of us into that place so vaguely known as the next world," responded Waller, as he tied a white handkerchief to the point of his sword, and then Salee Mohammed Khan was seen to unwind and wave the cloth of his turban in response.

By this action they knew that all idea of resistance was at an end, and that they should be received as friends. The gates of the fort were unbarricaded and thrown open, and many of the ladies now began to appear, timidly but curiously and expectantly, thronging forward to meet those whom they had been told were come "to meet and to save them."

Waller, who had manifested an air of blunt and soldierly resolution and energy up to this period, now felt his emotions somewhat overpowering, or perhaps he wished to see and hear something of Mabel, before making himself known ; so checking his horse, he permitted Sir Richmond Shakespere, as his leader, to ride forward.

Listing his Kussilbash cap, his frank English face, though sunburned and lined, beaming with pleasure and joy the while,

"Rejoice," he cried enthusiastically, "rejoice, ladies ! Your delivery is accomplished. Dear ladies and comrades, all your fears and your sufferings are at an end!"

There was no loud or noisy response ; the emotions of all were too deep and heartfelt for such utterances ; and, with feelings which no description can convey to the imagination, Waller and Shakespere found themselves surrounded by the captives, male and female, exactly one hundred and six in number, of all ranks—captives whom by their energy, activity, and rapid expedition they had saved from a fate that might never have been known ; for the news of their arrival caused Hazarees and Toorkomans alike to disperse, and even Zoolfcar Khan abandoned all idea of attempting to carry them off.

The happiest moments of existence are perhaps the most difficult to delineate on paper ; but Bob Waller, as he folded Mabel Trecarrel sobbing hysterically to his breast, laughing and weeping at the same moment, despite and heedless of all the eyes that looked thereon—he a thorough-bred Englishman, and as such innately abhorrent of "a scene"—forgot the crowd, the Kussilbashes, the Dooranees, the grinning grooms and dhooley-wallahs—he forgot all in the joy of the moment, or by a chain of thought remembered only a passage of "Othello," when, in garrison theatricals, he had once figured as the Moor, with Harry Burgoine for a Desdemona—

" If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy ; for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."

And Sir Richmond Shakespere, as he stood smiling by the centre and blissful-looking group (now beginning clamorously to pour questions upon him), ladies and officers, hollow-eyed, haggard, and pale, began to perceive what had made Captain Robert Waller, of the Cornish Light Infantry, take so deep an interest in the Trecarrels, and why he had been the most active, energetic, and, so far as danger went, the most reckless staff officer during our perilous advance up the passes and in the subsequent pursuit.

Waller did not find Mabel quite so much changed as he had feared she might be : yet she was the wreck of what she had been in happier times—the tall, full-bosomed, and statuesque-looking English girl, with clear, calm, bright, and confident eyes. The latter were still bright, but their lustre was unnatural ; their expression was a wild and hunted one ; her colour was gone, and her cheeks were deathly pale. But all in the group of hostages were alike in those respects. For many months had they not been daily, sometimes hourly, face to face with death ?

But Waller, as she hung on his breast and looked with eyes upturned upon him, had never seemed so handsome in her sight : his form and face were to her as the beau-ideal of Saxon manliness and beauty ; but his complexion, once nearly as fair as her own, was burned red now, by the exposure consequent to the two last campaigns ; his forehead clear and open, his nose straight, his mouth large perhaps, but well-shaped and laughing ; and then he had in greater luxuriance than ever his long, fair, fly-away whiskers ; and, save his Afghan dress, he looked every inch the jolly, frank, and burly Bob Waller of other times, especially when, as if he thought “the scene” had lasted long enough, he drew Mabel’s arm through his, led her a little way apart, and proceeded leisurely to prepare a cigar for smoking.

“ So Bob, dear, dear Bob, my presentiment has come true after all,” she exclaimed ; “ and this horrid Bameean has seen the end of all our sorrows ! ”

“ But it was *not* such an end as *this* your foreboding heart had anticipated, Mabel,” replied Waller, caressing her hand in his, and pressing it against his heart.

Major Pottinger, who had now the command, ordered that all must prepare at once to quit Bameean, and avoid further risks by falling back on their supports, lest Ackbar Khan might come on them after all. To lessen the chance of that, however, the wily Saleh Mohammed, who knew by sure intelligence from his scouts that Ackbar was to proceed, with the relics of his army, through the Akrobat Pass into the Balkh, advised that all should take a circuitous route towards Cabul ; and this suggestion was at once adopted by the now-happy hostages and the escort.

Two days afterwards, as they were traversing the summit of a little mountain pass, their long and winding train of horse and foot guarded by Kussilbash Lancers and the wilder-looking Doo-ranees, they came suddenly in sight of those whom General Pollock had sent to meet and, if necessary, to succour them.

These were Her Majesty’s 3rd Light Dragoons, the 1st Bengal Cavalry, and Captain Backhouse’s train of mountain guns, all led by Sir Robert Sale in person ; and who might describe the joy of that meeting, when the rescued hostages cast their eager

eyes and hands towards them in joy, and when they saw the old familiar uniforms covering all the green slope, while the cavalry came galloping and the infantry rushing tumultuously towards them !

The dragoons sprang from their horses, the infantry broke their ranks, and the men of the 13th Light Infantry crowded round the wife of their colonel and the other rescued ladies, holding out their hard brown hands in welcome ; eyes were glistening, lips quivering, and many a hurrah was, for a time, half choked by emotion and sympathy, while officers and soldiers again and again shook hands like brothers that had been long parted.

Friends now met friends from whom they had been so long and painfully separated ; wives threw themselves exultingly and passionately into the arms of their husbands ; daughters leaned upon their fathers' breasts and wept. Many there were whose widowed hearts had none to meet them there ; and many an orphan child stretched forth its little hands to the ranks wherein its father marched no more, though some might give a kiss or a caress to "Tom Brown's little 'un—Tom that was killed at Ghuznee," or to the "little lass of Corporal Smith—poor Jack that was killed with his missus at Khoord Cabul ;" but these sad episodes were soon forgotten amid the general joy.

Wheeled round on the mountain slope, the artillery thundered forth a royal salute ; muskets and swords were brandished in the sunshine ; caps tossed up, to be caught and tossed up again ; reiterated English cheers woke the echoes of the hills of Jubeaiz, which seemed to repeat the sounds of joy to the winds again and again.



CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE DURBAR.

"COINCIDENCE," saith Ouida, "is a god that greatly influences human affairs ;" and the sequel to our story will prove the truth of this trite aphorism, when we now change the scene from Cabul to our cantonment, in the territory between the Sutledge and the Jumna—to the Court Sanatorium of Bengal—the country mansion of the Governor-General at Simla, a beautiful little town of some five hundred houses, built on the slope of the mighty Himalayas, where, amid a veritable forest of oak, evergreens, and rhododendron, and the loveliest flora a temperate zone can produce, surrounded by that wondrous assemblage of snow-covered peaks that rise in every imaginable shape (a portion of those bulwarks of the world, that slope from the left

bank of the Indus away to the steppes of Tartary and the marshes of Siberia), the representative of the Queen retires periodically to refresh exhausted nature, and mature the plans of government in those cool and pleasant recesses, where the pun-kah is no longer requisite; where one may sleep without dread of mosquitos and green bugs, nor welcome cold tea at noon as preferable to iced champagne.

By the time that Audley Trevelyan had reached this occasional seat of government—the Balmoral of India—Lord Auckland, whose vacillation and mismanagement of the Cabul campaign gave great umbrage, had returned to Britain, and another Governor-General had arrived—one who boldly stigmatised the Afghan project of his predecessor (now created an earl) “as a folly, and that it yet remained to be seen whether it might not prove a crime;” and so Audley presented, of necessity, the reports and Jellalabad despatches of Sir Robert Sale to this new Viceroy, whose firmness of character and past promise as a statesman gave a guerdon that we should yet retrieve all that we had lost of prestige beyond the Indus; to which end he took the executive power from the weak hands of those secretaries to whom it had been previously committed, and resolved to wield it himself, though he found in India a treasury well-nigh empty, an army exasperated, and the hearts of men depressed by fears for the future.

But tidings of the storming of Ghuznee by General Nott, of the advance upon Cabul, the recapture of it after our victory at Tizeen, and the rescue of the hostages, followed so quickly upon each other to Simla, that soon after the arrival of Audley, he was informed that as there would be no necessity for his return to Jellalabad, he was to remain provisionally attached to the staff, either till he could rejoin his regiment, or our troops re-entered the Punjab—a little slice of India, having a population equal to all that of England. So by this arrangement he found himself a mere idler, a dangler attached to the Viceregal court, where now the glorious war that Napier was to inaugurate against the treacherous Ameers of Scinde was schemed out, and where a series of reviews, dinners, balls, and a durbar, or assembly of the native princes, was proposed to welcome Pollock’s troops when they came down country, and were once again, as the Viceroy expressed it, in “our native territories;” and the programme of all those gaieties was to be fully arranged when his lady and other ladies of the mimic court arrived, after the rainy season, which continues there from June till the middle of September, was nearly over.

On the first day of October, when her ladyship and suite were to arrive, the durbar of native princes was to be held, and the

final proclamation of the Governor-General concerning the affairs of Afghanistan was to be read aloud and issued. As this was but an instance of Anglo-Indian pageantry, though Audley Trevelyan rode amid the brilliant staff of his Excellency, and it all led to something of more interest, we shall only notice it briefly.

The durbar was, indeed, a magnificent spectacle! On a great plateau of brilliant green, smooth as English turf, that lies near the ridge which is crowned by the white plastered mansions of Simla, dotted here and there and finally bordered by dark clumps of heavily foliated oaks, towering rhododendrons, and over all by mighty, spire-like Himalayan pines; it took place under a clear and lovely sky, and the locality was indeed picturesque and impressive; for in the distance, as a background, towered that wonderful sea of snow-clad peaks, covered with eternal whiteness—peaks between which lie the deep paths and passes that lead to Chinese Tartary, the wilderness of Lop, and the deserts of Gobi. Here and there, amid the green clumps and gardens full of rare trees and lovely flowers, a white marble dome, or a tall and needle-like minaret, each stone thereof a miracle of carving, broke the line of the clear blue cloudless sky.

On this auspicious occasion all the Rajahs, Maharajahs, chiefs, Maliks, Sirdirs, and other men of rank, from the protected Sikh territory that lies between the Sutledge and the Jumna, and even from beyond it, were present with their trains of followers, in all the gorgeous richness of Oriental costume, bright with plumage, silks and satins, brilliant with arms and the jewels of a land where sapphires and diamonds, rubies and opals, seem to be plentiful as pebbles are by the wayside in Europe.

At the extreme end of the plateau stood the lofty, parti-coloured tent of the Viceroy, with its cords of silk and cotton; within it was placed a dais that was spread with cloth of gold, and covered by a crimson canopy. On each side of his throne, ranged in the form of an ellipse, were divans or seats for six hundred Indians of the highest rank, while all the officers of the garrison, the guards, and the staff, in their full uniform, with all their medals and orders, added to the splendour of the spectacle, when chief after chief was introduced, duly presented, and marshalled to his seat in succession, amid the sound of many trumpets.

Opposite this ellipse were ranged their followers on foot or horseback; and, immediately in the centre of all, were drawn up in line more than fifty elephants, stolid, and well-nigh motionless, trapped in velvet and gold from the saddle to their huge, unwieldy feet, bearing lofty and gilded howdahs, some like castles of silver, wherein were the wives and familes of some of the princes present. All around glittered spears and arms; scores of dancing girls were there too, richly dressed, singing the

soft monotonous airs of the land in Persic or Hindoo-Persic ; and a mighty throng of copper-coloured natives, turbaned, and scantily clad in a cummerbund or the dhottie at most, made up minor accessories of the general picture.

Over all this, Audley, on foot and leaning on his sword, was looking, glass in eye, with somewhat of the listlessness of the *blasé* Englishman ; for he had been amid scenes so stirring of late, that mere pageantry failed alike to impress or interest him. Neither cared he, assuredly, for the address of the Governor-General, who was announcing in the Oordoo language that, the disasters in Afghanistan having been fully avenged, the army of the Queen would be withdrawn for ever to the eastern bank of the Sutledge ; then his glances began to wander over the bright group of English ladies, so brilliantly dressed, so exquisitely fair, to the eye accustomed so long to Indian dusk, and who now attended the recently arrived wife of the representative of British royalty.

Among them was one whose face and figure awoke a strong interest in his heart. Her dress was very plain, even to simplicity—too much so for such a place ; her ornaments were very few, all of jet, and rather meagre. All this his practised eye could take in at a glance ; but there was something about her that fascinated and riveted his attention.

Not much over nineteen, apparently, and rather petite in stature, she looked consequently younger—more girlish than her years ; but her figure was graceful, her air indescribably high-bred, and having in it a *hauteur* that, being quite unconscious, was becoming. Her eyes were dark, her lashes long and black, her complexion colourless and pure, and her thick hair was in waves and masses, dressed Audley scarcely knew in what fashion, but in a somewhat negligent mode that was sorely bewitching.

Her face was always half turned away from where he stood ; for she, utterly oblivious of the Oordoo harangue of his Excellency, was toying with her fan or the white silk tassels of her gloves, while chatting gaily, confidently, and with a downcast smile to a young officer of the Anglo-Indian Staff, and clad in the gorgeous uniform of the Bengal Irregular Cavalry.

That she was a beautiful girl, a little proud, perhaps of the *sang-azure* in her veins, was pretty evident ; that she might be impulsive, too, and quick to ire, was also evident, from the little impatient glances she gave about her, by a quivering of the white eye-lid, and an occasional short respiration ; that she might be a little passionate, too, if thwarted, was suggested by the curve of her lips and chin. For the critical eye of Master Audley Trevelyan saw all this ; but his spirit was seriously perplexed : he had certainly seen this attractive little fair one before—but *where* ?

He was about to turn and ask some one near concerning her, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a young officer, whose new scarlet coat, untarnished epaulettes, and fair ruddy face announced him fresh from Europe, said smilingly, "Ah, Trevelyan, how d'ye do?—remember me, don't you?"

"I think so: surely we met at Maidstone, when I first joined."

"Maidstone! why, you griff, I should think so. Don't you remember leaving us at Allahabad, after Jack Delamere died?"

"By Jove, Stapylton—Stapylton, of the 14th! How are you, old fellow?"

"The same;" and they shook hands, as he now recognised a brother subaltern of his old Hussar corps.

"And you are here on the staff?" said Stapylton.

"Like yourself; but *pro tem.* till sent off to head-quarters. You came up country with her ladyship?"

"Ah—yes."

"Who is that lovely girl near her?"

"Which?"

"She in the white silk, and lace trimmed with black a kind of second mourning I take it to be."

"Oh, you needn't ask with any interested views. A proud, reserved minx is that little party; but she has been going the pace with that fellow of the Irregular Horse, to whom she is talking and smiling now, and did so all the way out overland. It was an awful case of spoon in the Red Sea, just where Pharaoh was swallowed up; and the Viceroy's wife is very anxious to make a match of it, as a plea for an extra ball."

"But who is she?"

"Oh, some interesting orphan."

"But her name?"

"A Miss Devereaux—Sybil Devereaux. I made an acrostic on it off the Point de Galle," added the ex-Hussar, as the object of their mutual interest turned at that moment casually towards them, and for the first time looked fully in their direction; and then Audley, while he almost held his breath, recognised the dark eyes, the minute little face, the firm lip, and even now could hear the once-familiar voice of Sybil; but she was talking smilingly to another; and as the words of the heedless Stapylton began to rankle in his heart, something of anger, jealousy, and pique mingled with his astonishment.

Another was now playing with Sybil the very part that he had done at Kabul with Rose, to the exasperation of poor Denzil, whom, for months before he really died, Sybil had schooled herself to number as among the slain in Afghanistan; hence her little jet ornaments and black trimmings, the only tribute she could pay his memory now.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE LAMP OF LOVE.

AND this fellow of the Irregular Horse—this fellow who was so insufferably good-looking, and seemed to know it too—this interloper, for so Audley Trevelyan chose to consider him—what manner of advances had he already made, and how had she received them on that overland route, so perilous from the propinquity and the hourly chances it affords of acquaintance ripening into friendship, and of friendship into love?

Was he only to meet her unexpectedly, and, by that strange influence of coincidence already referred to, to find himself supplemented, it might be, and on the verge of losing, if he had not already—deservedly as he felt—lost her?

Did it never occur to the Honourable Mr. Audley Trevelyan that, separating as they did, there were a thousand chances to one against their ever meeting again in this world, and, more than all, the world of India?

He watched long and anxiously; there was no sign of her seeing or recognising him, and, placed where they were, apart, he had neither excuse nor opportunity for drawing near her. The durbar closed at last; a banquet, solemn and magnificent, followed; then, on lumbering elephants and beautiful horses, the various dignitaries withdrew, each followed by his noisy and half-nude *suwarri*. A small but select evening party of Europeans was invited that night to the house of the Viceroy; thither went Audley; and there, as he had quite anticipated, they met, not in the suite of rooms, however, but in the magnificent gardens, where there was a display of those wonderful rockets, stars, wooden shells that burst in mid air, displaying a thousand prismatic hues, and many others of those pyrotechnic efforts in which the Indians so peculiarly excel.

In a walk of the garden, while actually seeking for her, he met Sybil face to face, but leaning on the arm of the same brilliantly dressed officer; for no uniform is more gorgeous or lavish than that of the Irregular Horse, for fancy, vanity, and the army-tailor “run riot” together. He was carrying his cap under his other arm, and seemed entirely satisfied with himself and his companion, in whose pretty ear he was whispering, while smiling, with all the provoking air of a privileged man.

“Ah, Miss Devereaux—you surely remember me?” said Audley, bowing low, with a flush on his brow, and, despite all his efforts, an unmistakable sickly smile in his face.

Sybil grew a trifle paler, as she presented her hand, with a far from startled expression; for she had been quite aware that he

was somewhere about the Viceregal Court, and therefore, to her, the meeting was not quite so unexpected.

" You do not seem surprised?" said he.

" Why should I, Mr. Trevelyan, when I knew that you were here?" she replied with perfect candour; " but I am so—so delighted—indeed I am, Audley," then perceiving that there was an undoubted awkwardness in all this, she coloured, while her eyes sparkled with vexation, and she introduced the two gentlemen rather nervously by name, and then added, in an explanatory tone, to the cavalry officer, " He is quite an old friend, believe me—the same who saved my life, Surely I told you?"

" I am not aware—oh yes—perhaps," drawled the other: " at Cairo, was it not?"

" No, no—in Cornwall."

" But it was in Cairo you told me, when we visited the citadel by moonlight——"

" And we are, as I said, such old friends," she added hastily.

" That, doubtless, you will have much to say to each other. Permit me; for I am perhaps *de trop*," interrupted the other, twirling a moustache, and looking somewhat cloudy; " but I shall hope to see you ere the trumpets announce supper," and with a smiling bow he resigned Sybil to Audley's proffered arm, and retired with a good grace to join another group.

" Sybil," said Audley, after a half-minute's pause, during which he had been surveying her with fond and loving eyes, " by what singular incidence of the stars are we blessed by meeting thus?"

" You may well ask, if such you feel it to be," she replied calmly, and her voice made his heart vibrate as she spoke; " yet it is simple and prosaic enough. I am here solely by the influence of misfortune."

" Misfortune?"

" Yes."

" Oh, explain."

" When poor mamma died, what was left for me but to eat the bread of dependence?—and I am a dependant now."

" Sybil!"

" I came to India as that which you find me."

" And that is——"

" The humble friend—the companion, for it is nothing more in plain English—of the Governor-General's lady. Mamma gone—Denzil, too, in Afghanistan—was I not fortunate in finding such a home?"

" My poor Sybil," exclaimed Audley, gnawing his moustache and pressing her soft hand and arm against his side. Then he became silent, as the past and present, for a little, held his soul in thrall; and far from the brilliant fête of the Anglo-Indian

Court his mind flashed back to other days, and he saw again only Sybil Devereaux and the purple moorland, the solemn rock-pillar, the lonely tarn, with its osier isles, the long-legged heron and the blue kingfisher amid its green reedy sedges, and in the soft sunlight the grey granite carks cast their shadows on the lee, as when he had seen her on that day when first they met ; and much of shame for himself and for his father mingled with the memory and his emotion.

But there was a change here !

The poor, pale girl, who had so anxiously and wearily sought to sell her pencilled sketches and water-coloured drawings in the shops of the little market town, who so often with an aching heart took them back, through the mist and the rain and the wind, to the humble cottage where her mother lay dying, was now in a very different sphere, richly though modestly dressed, easy in air and bearing, perfectly self-possessed, surrounded by wealth and rank, yet with all the secret pride of her little heart, meek, gentle, and happy in aspect.

She, too, was silent for a time, during which she glanced at him covertly and timidly.

“Here again was Audley,” was the thought of her heart ; “did he love her still ? Had he truly loved her, even *then* ?” was the next thought, and her heart half answered, “Yes—he had loved her, but only as the worldly love ;” and this fear, this half-conviction, dashed her present joy. Yet no woman wishes to believe, or cares to admit even to herself, that the power she once exerted over a man’s heart can, under any circumstances, pass altogether away.

“Sybil,” said he, “you, any more than I, cannot have forgotten all our past, and the scenes where we met—the wild shore, the precipices, the grey granite rocks of our own Cornwall ; and that awful hour in the Pixies’ Cave, too—can you have forgotten that ?”

“Far from it, Audley,—I have forgotten *nothing*; and now I must remember the difference of rank that places us so far—so very far apart,” she added with a strange flash in her eye and a quiver in her short upper lip.

“Come this way, dear Sybil. I have much to say—to talk with you about—but we must be alone ;” and he led her down a less frequented walk, apart from the company, the strains of the military music, the coloured lights and lanterns that hung in garlands and festoons from tree to tree, and the soaring fireworks that ever and anon filled the soft dewy air with the splendour of many-hued brilliance.

“Will not this seem marked ?” asked Sybil nervously and almost haughtily.

“ How ?”

“ I must beware of attracting notice now—here especially ; and you are no longer the mere Audley Trevelyan of other times.”

“ Then, dearest, who the deuce am I ?” asked he, laughing.

Sybil had seen the Hindoo maidens—slender, graceful, and dark-eyed girls—launching their love-lamps from the ghauts upon the sacred waters of the Ganges—watching them with thrills of alternate joy and fear, as they floated away under the glorious silver radiance of the Indian moon. She had heard their wails of sorrow if the flame flickered out and died ; or their merry shouts and songs of glee if they floated steadily and burned truly and bravely. Audley’s affection had been to her as a light in her path that had vanished ; but now her love-lamp seemed to be lit again ; for Audley, with admirable tact, conversed with her as if on their old and former footing, expressing only what he felt—the purest and deepest joy at thus suddenly meeting her again, and he had too much good taste to make the slightest reference to the gossip of his friend Stapylton, the ex-Hussar, though certainly he had neither forgotten it nor the unpleasantly off-hand mode in which it had been communicated to him.

“ But how strange—to come to India, my dear girl, of all places in the world ; What led you to think of it ?” he asked.

“ Have I not already told you ? I did not think of it : chance threw the offer in my way ; and I had two sufficient reasons, at least, for accepting of it.”

“ And these—bless them, say I !—these were——”

“ That my brother, dear Denzil, was here—here then, at least.”

“ And I—too ?”

“ I do not say so—least of all must I say so *now* ; and then Lady —’s offers were most advantageous to a penniless girl like me. You and, more than all, your father, deemed me no suitable match for you, when we were in England—when I was an inmate of my parent’s house at Porthellick. You see, I speak quite plainly, Audley, and as one who is quite alone in the world ; now, when by death and—and misfortune, I am reduced to eat the bread of dependence, the matter is worse than ever.”

“ But you love me still, Sybil—do you not ?”

She was silent and trembling now.

“ Speak,” he urged ; “ you do love me still ?”

“ Yes, Audley.”

“ And will marry me, Sybil ?”

“ No.”

“ You love another then—another in secret ?”

“ No—one may not, cannot, love two.”

But Audley thought of Stapylton and that devilish Irregular Horseman, and struck the heel of his glazed boot viciously into the gravel of the path.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER a pause he resumed—

“There is something in your tone, Sybil, that I do not understand. Doubtless your heart has much to accuse me of; but I have been the victim of circumstances, of my father’s odd whimsical views—his selfishness, in fact; but here I can cast all such at defiance,” he added, gathering courage as he perceived that she still wore on her hand—and what a pretty plump little hand it was!—his diamond betrothal ring—the diamond that whilom had figured as an eye of Vishnu, till Sergeant Treherne poked it out with his bayonet at Agra. “Listen, dearest Sybil; we are far away from England with all its insular and provincial prejudices—away from those local influences which my family exercised over me—my father’s hostility, my mother’s sneers, and so forth. I am secure of staff appointments—better these than casual loot or batta, I can tell you. I am independent of home allowances; and, to talk solidly and plainly, can think now in earnest of matrimony. Listen to me, Sybil;” and glancing hastily about, he tried to slip an arm round her, but she nimbly eluded him, and said—

“Then you have not heard the news we brought up country with us?”

“News!”

“Yes—my poor Audley.”

“About what?”

“Your change of circumstances.”

“Mine!—dearest Sybil, what can you mean?”

“Your succession to the title.”

“Circumstances—title!—explain, in Heaven’s name, Sybil.”

She then told him that his father had died suddenly—died, as the *Morning Post* announced, in the same library at Rhoscadzhel, and somewhat in the same manner, as his late uncle, when he was in the act of composing a long and elaborate paper legally reviewing the merits of the Afghan war; another grave had been opened and closed in the family tomb; another escutcheon hung on the porte-cochère of the princely old manor-house; and that he, Audley Trevelyan, was now Lord Lamorna,

as the Governor-General would doubtless announce to him on the morrow.

And in his lonely tomb beside the Kussilbash fort lay one who could never dispute the family honours with him, and whose sorrows and repinings were past for evermore.

Audley was overwhelmed for a few minutes by this unexpected intelligence. There had been no great love, no strong tie, no fine yet unseen ligament, between father and son ; yet the dead man *was* his father, and he knew had ever been proud of him. He was shocked, but not deeply grieved ; and “some natural tears he shed,” no more.

His father, however, prudential and unscrupulous in his children’s interests, had always been cold, prosaic, undemonstrative, and unlovable to them and to all. Hence he passed away, having so little individuality that the blank made by his absence left no craving, and required no filling up ; but, nevertheless, for a time, his cold, pale eyes and equally cold, glittering spectacle-glasses came vividly back to his son’s memory.

Audley was, however, to say the least of it, so much disconcerted by the news Sybil had given him, that he lacked sufficient energy to retain her when she was swept from his side by the officer of the Irregulars, on a theatrical flourish of the vice-regal trumpets announcing that the supper-rooms were open.

The course of balls and other entertainments that followed the durbar and the news from Cabul were attended by neither Sybil nor Audley, now recognised and congratulated by all the European society at Simla as Lord Lamorna, and by the Viceroy, who offered him all the leave he might require to settle his affairs at home. Sybil had her brother’s recent death to plead ; and she looked forward with intense interest to seeing Waller, and to the returning army, though Denzil was no longer in its ranks.

They heard at Simla, how General Pollock had dismounted or destroyed every cannon in the Bala Hissar and in the city, and given to the flames the Mosque of the Feringhees, an edifice built by the vanity of Ackbar to consecrate and commemorate the sanguinary destruction of Elphinstone’s army ; the great bazaar also, once the emporium of the Eastern world ; and how all the castles and forts of the khans and chiefs had likewise been given to the flames ; how the sky was reddened for days and nights, and that the fiery gleam of the burning city was still visible on the close of the fourth day, when our rear guard was defiling through the mountains of Bhootkak on their homeward route to the Sutledge. Thus was the massacre of Khoord Cabul finally avenged ; but, as Sybil thought in her heart, “would it restore the dead ?”

Their graves, unmarked and unconsecrated, and the ruined

city alone remained to tell of the strife that had been. A touching address, signed by all the ladies whom his energy and activity had done so much to rescue, was delivered to Sir Richmond Shakespere ; and with Taj Mohammed Khan, the discarded Wuzeer of Cabul, a beggared fugitive and exile, as the sole friend who accompanied them, our troops came down on their homeward way, laden with spoil, and among it the great gates of Somnath, an object of adoration to the Hindoos ; and thus ended the fatal war in Afghanistan.

Audley had been duly informed by letters, that his brother-officer, Waller, and the Trecarrels were also coming down country, and should ere long be at Ferozpoore or Simla ; and Sybil, who had now heard all the story of Rose and Denzil, longed, with a longing that no words can describe, to see her.

There is no emotion in this world more delightful, and nothing perhaps more beautiful, than a young girl's first dream of love ; for a young man's first affair of the heart is even different in some respects. It is so full of innocence, of simplicity and truth, if the girl is pure and ingenuous ; it is so full, also, of a new-born mystery, a charm, and a world of thought, of chance and risk, where there may be triumph or defeat, victory or failure, sorrow perhaps, and joy perhaps—but still she hopes, above all a delight and happiness hitherto unknown. Hence it becomes, absorbing ; and such had been Sybil's love for Audley at home when she had the shelter of her mother's breast, and such for a time it had been after they were to all appearance so hopelessly separated ; and now, after a lull, or being for a space, as it were, suppressed and crushed well-nigh out, by change, by distance, time, and travel,—now the love-lamp shone again.

And Audley, ere he had heard of his succession to that title which should have been Denzil's had fated Denzil lived, had made her an abrupt but formal proposal of his hand. Would he renew it now ?

She was not left long in doubt ; for under the cognizance and with the express approbation of the wife of the Viceroy, who deemed herself in the place of mother and protectress to Sybil, he renewed his offer, and then the lady judiciously left the cousins—for such he had told her they were—to settle the matter between them.

“ Ah ! Audley,” said Sybil, “ too well do you know how I am situated ; what or whom have I to cling to in this world—but you, perhaps ? ” she added, with a low voice, while her breast heaved, and her half-averted face was full of passionate tenderness. “ Now that my poor Denzil is gone, nor kith, nor kin, nor inheritance—what can I offer you in return ? ”

“ Yourself, darling ; what more do I ask in this world ? ” he

said, in a low and earnest voice, as he gradually drew her nearer him ; and as her hand went caressingly on his neck, it seemed to him a dearer collar than either the Bath or Garter could be, for "what is all the glory of the world compared with the joy of thus meeting—thus having those we love?"

"Now, Sybil," said he, "you find how difficult it is to forget that one has loved——"

"And been beloved," murmured the girl.

"More than all by such a pure-souled heart as yours. You remember our first meeting by the tarn?"

"Could I ever forget it?"

"And our learned disquisition on flirtation, too. How odd it seems now, darling."

"And dear old Rajah—you have not our rough, shaggy *introduction* with you," said Sybil, smiling.

"Poor dog, no. I left him at home in Rhoscadzhel, and, somehow, he is dead ; that is all I know about it—so Gartha told me in a letter."

"All who love me die—even the poor dog. Surely they would be kind to your pet for your sake."

"They—well, I don't know—doubtless."

Audley cared not to say that, by his lady-mother's orders, the dog had been destroyed as a nuisance—the last legacy of his comrade, poor Delamere, who died in the jungle.

"Ah ! if my dear Denzil had lived to see this day," said the happy girl, after a pause that was full of thought.

"Sybil, God knows how, for your sake, even at the time when I never, never, hoped to see you more, I sought to protect and love your brother ; but he repelled, avoided, and seemed to loathe me. Yet he saved my life in the Khyber Pass. It was through sorrow for his mother—and—and, perhaps, love for Rose Treccarrel ; for he would be jealous of me, among other things, poor lad !"

"And she—she ?"

"Rose was very heedless, Sybil ; but, after all Bob Waller has written, let us not talk of the past now. You will learn to love her well, I know."

"I hope so : I must—I shall, for Denzil's sake."

"My sweet little love !—my Sybil, so tender and so true !" exclaimed Audley, pressing her with ardour to his breast.

But a short time ago, Sybil had been hoping that she would forget him ; hoping, while journeying towards the land where he was—the land of the Sun—she who long since should have been his wife. She had striven for forgetfulness, hopelessly, yet with something of earnestness in the desire ; and now that she had heard his voice again, the old spell was upon her—the spell of

past hours, of remembered days—the spell of her lover's presence; and to be with him, the girl acknowledged in her heart, was to be in heaven again.

But now, we fear that we have intruded upon them quite long enough.

And so, till the time came when they should be joined by Waller and the Trecarrels (for companionship, it had been arranged that they should all take the journey by dawk and river-steamer, and then the overland route home together), the days passed pleasantly and swiftly at delightful Simla, in rides and drives among its wonderful scenery; where the netted bramble, the great strawberry, and giant fern covered all the rocks; the soft peach, the dark plum, the rosy apple, and the golden pear grew wild; and the dark-green pines, vast in proportion as the stupendous Himalayas, from whence they sprang, cast a solemn shadow over all, making deep and leafy recesses where the monkey swung by his tail, the buffalo browsed at noon, the leopard and the wild hog lurked for their food; by mountain villages that clustered near the fortified dwelling of the chieftain whose tower was built like the cone of an English glass house; by hill and vale, rock and stream, where flocks were grazing, watched by shepherds quaint and savage-looking as their rural god, the son of Mercury, and by Thibet mastiffs, that reminded Sybil of her lover's four-footed friend, the Rajah of past days; and ever and anon, as they drove, or rode, or rambled, they talked, as lovers will do, of their future home in Cornwall, with all its associations so dear to them, and now so far away, and so they would marvel

“ What feet trod paths that now no more
 Their feet together tread ?
 How in the twilight looked the shore ?
 Was still the sea outspread
 Beneath the sky, a silent plain,
 Of silver lamps that wax and wane ?
 What ships went sailing by the strand
 Of that fair consecrated land ? ”

Waller arrived at Simla to find himself gazetted in the *Bengal Hurkaru* as major, and to get, like Audley, his glittering Order of the Dooranee Empire from the hands of the Viceroy; therefore he hung it round the white neck of Mabel, while Rose fell heiress to that which should, had he survived, have been her father's decoration.

So the schemes, the plotting with the wretched solicitor, Sharkley, and all the avarice of Downie Trevelyan availed him nothing in one sense; for now the daughter of that Constance Devereaux he had so cruelly wronged was coming home to

Rhoscadzhel as the bride of his son, and in her own hereditary place as the Lady of Lamorna.

It is but justice to his memory, however, to record that, having some premonition or presentiment that death was near, or might come on him as it came on his older kinsman, something of the spirit of the Christian and the gentleman got the better of the more cold-blooded and sordid training of the lawyer; and Downie wrote out, sealed up, and left a confession concerning the two papers he had obtained and destroyed; and this document was found tied up with his will, in the library of Rhoscadzhel, by Messrs. Gorbelly and Culverhole, his astounded solicitors. Not that any act of roguery surprised them, but only the folly of any man ever committing the admission thereof to ink and paper.

Audley and Sybil were but one couple out of several, especially among the rescuers and the rescued, who were seized with matrimonial fancies to make Simla gay after the retreat from Cabul—the result of propinquity, perhaps, and the system of chances. We may briefly state that they were married by the chaplain of the Governor-General, who gave the bride away; and not long after, Waller gave Mabel's marriage-ring a guard, wherein was set a jewel, the envy of all the ladies there—the sapphire which he had plucked from the steel cap of Amen Oollah Khan at the Battle of Tizeen.

At Simla Rose was thus twice a bridesmaid, and a lovely one she looked.

But was Rose ever married in the end? some may ask; for such a girl could not be without offers, especially in India. We have only to add, that the once-gay and heedless Rose Trecarrel is unwedded still.

On many a grey carn and lofty and rugged headland in Cornwall were fires, lighted by the miners and peasantry but chiefly about Rhoscadzhel—beacons so bright in honour of the new lord and lady, that they shone far over land and sea, and in such numbers that the Guebres and fire-worshippers of old, could they have seen them, might have deemed that the adoration of the Fire-god was again in its glory, as when the Scilly Isles were consecrated to the sun; and Derrick Braddon, who, on the strength of recent changes, had installed himself as a species of deputy-governor or major-domo at Rhoscadzhel, had a deep carouse, in which he was fully assisted by Messrs. Jasper Funnell, old Boxer, and others of the plush-breeched and aiguilleted fraternity.

Meanwhile, those whose fortunes we have followed throughout the campaign of Western India and the retreat from Cabul were speeding homeward, and when from the coast of Orissa they saw the steamer awaiting them in the rough and dangerous roadstead

of Balasore, where usually the Calcutta pilots leave the home-bound ships, they hailed the bright blue world of waters as an old friend ; for, to our island-born, "the sea, the sea," is what it was to the returning Greeks of old Xenophon !

"Now, Mabel," said Waller, as with a lorgnette in her pretty hand she surveyed the roadstead—the plain gold hoop on that hand being in Bob Waller's eyes the most charming trinket there, "a few weeks more, and all these foreign seas and shores will be left far behind ; we shall be home at our little place that looks from Cornwall on the apple-bowers of Devon. Ha ! Trevelyan, you and I shall then each sit down under his own vine and fig-tree in peace, and enjoy a quiet weed, like the patriarch of old—if the said patriarch ever possessed one. What say you, my Lady Lamorna ?" he added, as he assisted Sybil's light figure to spring from the handsome and well-hung carriage in which they had travelled from Calcutta.

Sybil only smiled, and looked joyously at the sea, as she threw up the white lace veil of her bridal bonnet ; and Audley, too, was gazing on the sea.

"Waller, we have undergone much," said he—"days of danger, and nights of anguish, yet we have survived them all, and been true to the end, and in the past have fully realised the force of the maxim that—

'Come what come may,
Time and the Hour runs through the roughest day.' "

THE END.

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